

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1104

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,104.....

Witness

Thomas Brennan,
Main Street,
Tramore,
Co. Waterford.

Identity.

Lieutenant 'D' Company, 4th Battalion,
East Waterford brigade;
Vice-Comd't. do.

Subject.

'D' Company 4th Battalion East Waterford brigade,
1918-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No.S. 2374.....

Form B.S.M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1013/21 104
BUREAU STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21
No. W.S. 1104

STATEMENT BY THOMAS BRENNAN

Main Street, Tramore, Co. Waterford.

I was born at Green's Bridge, Kilkenny, in the year 1899. My father, Thomas Brennan, was a farmer's son from Co. Leix, and was a sergeant in R.I.C. stationed in Kilkenny city at the time of my birth. My mother was a native of Waterford city.

About the year 1902 my father retired from the R.I.C. and took up a position as manager of a publichouse in the district of Ballytruckle, Waterford. The family moved there with him.

I went to school to the De La Salle Christian Brothers, Stephen St., Waterford, and played hurling and Gaelic football with the school's team in Waterford.

At the age of about 15 I left school and went to work as a clerk in Messrs. Harvey & Co., Printers, Georges St., Waterford. I joined the local Gaelic League where I attended Irish language classes and Irish dancing classes. These were conducted at the time by a man named Cormac McGinley, a Donegal man who happened to be working in Waterford then as some sort of builder's tradesman, i.e., a carpenter or bricklayer.

When the National Volunteers under John Redmond (the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the British House of Commons) were established in Waterford, I took no interest in the matter whatsoever.

My first official connection with the Irish Republican movement was when I joined the Irish Volunteers in or about the month of January 1918. I joined D/Company of the Waterford City Battalion, the officers of which were, so far as I can now recollect, Peadar Woods, commandant; Sean and Patrick Matthews were battalion officers; John D. Walsh was battalion quartermaster and Michael Ryan and Kieran Corbett were also prominent battalion officers at the time, but I do not remember in what capacity.

The captain of my company - D/Company - was Michael O'Neill. Michael O'Connell was a lieutenant in the company. We used parade once on a weekday and also on a Sunday. These parades were held generally outdoors, but, in the winter months, drilling etc. was carried on in the Volunteer Hall, Thomas St., Waterford. The strength of the company in early 1918 was about thirty men. We had no guns so far as I can remember.

During the parliamentary by-election of March 1918, which was contested by Dr. Vincent J. White of Waterford, representing Sinn Féin, and Captain William Redmond representing the Irish Parliamentary Party, I remember being in attendance at the Sinn Féin committee rooms in Colbeck St., Waterford, where meetings were held to deal with election organisation in general and I engaged in extensive canvassing in the city on behalf of Doctor White. Our company was mobilised during the election campaign to safeguard speakers at Sinn Féin meetings and to give protection to all those who were working for the success of the republican candidate. To the ordinary person living outside Waterford this may appear to have been quite unnecessary, but the political set-up in Waterford at that time was a most peculiar one.

There were three anti-national elements in those days, viz: The Unionists comprising the ascendancy classes; the element known popularly as the 'Ballybricken pig-buyers' which was entirely pro-Redmond and pro-British, and those who had connections with the British army, i.e., soldiers' wives and families and ex-British army men who were pensioned off. These three elements formed a most formidable opposition to anything appertaining to republicanism. They had everything at their disposal - money, influence, plus the backing of the British army authorities and the R.I.C. Against this powerful opposition the comparatively small republican political force in the area had, as can well be realised, terrific difficulties to overcome in its efforts to put before the electors its programme for the election.

It was necessary for the conduct of this important by-election of March 1918, that organisers be brought to Waterford from Sinn Féin H.Q. Dublin, and from almost every strong republican centre in the country. I remember the following prominent members in the Sinn Féin movement coming to Waterford at that time - Eamon de Valera, Sean McEntee, Harry Boland, Darrel Figgis, Laurence Ginnell, Joseph McGrath, Joe McGuinness, Longford, and Arthur Griffith. The latter stayed in my aunt's house at 67, The Manor, Waterford. Dan McCarthy of the H.Q. staff in Dublin was the chief organiser for the election. There were many other wellknown figures in the Sinn Féin movement down in Waterford helping out, but I cannot remember their names now.

The Metropole Hotel in Bridge St. was the H.Q. in Waterford for the republican party, but Mr. de Valera stayed in The Granville Hotel, The Quay, Waterford, as he failed to find accommodation in the Metropole. The first night he went to the Granville he was attacked by some of the Ballybricken pig-buyer crowd who were in the hotel when he arrived. Mr. de Valera and his friends had to defend themselves against the assault of these thugs as best they could. This sort of blackguardism, by the supporters of Redmond, was of frequent occurrence during the election campaign. On one occasion Mr. de Valera insisted on going out to canvas unaccompanied, being apparently under the impression that no harm could come to him. He wasn't very long out on the streets when he was set upon by the Redmondite mobs and, were it not for the fact that the Director of Elections had sent out a few men as a protection (unknown to Mr. de Valera) Mr. de Valera's foolhardy act might have resulted in serious consequences for him.

It might be worth recording, as a sign of the times, the following incident which occurred on 17th March 1918, when the by-election campaign in Waterford city was at its height. As

was customary each year on that day, various organisations in the city joined in a procession to honour the feast of our National Apostle. The Irish Party candidate in the election, the late Captain Wm. Redmond, brother of John Redmond, the Party leader, walked in the procession wearing British army uniform. Needless to say, he was not molested by any member of the party opposing him in the election, but, when some of the republican contingents in the procession were observed by Redmondite supporters on the sidewalk, a shower of stones and bottles was let loose on the processionists as they marched along. Despite the fact that we had orders to the contrary, I'm afraid that D/Company, of which I was a member, found it impossible to accept the situation and took the necessary steps to remove the opposition, which necessitated a determined attack on the Redmondite mob who were driven from their vantage points along the route of the procession.

On the election day I acted as personation agent in the district where I lived - Ballytruckle - for Dr. Vincent White the republican candidate. Excitement was tense all over the city that day as the Redmondites had, seemingly, an unlimited amount of money to spend on organisation, transport, etc., while, in comparison, our working crews were very limited both in money and numbers. Our men were continually beaten up whilst engaged on such jobs as conveying voters to the poll and everything possible was done by the opposition mobs to prevent republican sympathisers from going to the polling booths.

During the afternoon of polling day a howling mob of Redmond's supporters advanced on the Irish Volunteer Hall in Thomas St., Waterford, where there were assembled a large body of Volunteers from areas outside Waterford county who were drafted into the city to augment the republican election machine. The hall had six large windows on the front and side. It was densely peopled with men when the mob commenced to hurl stones

Cont

and various missiles through the windows. Men inside were badly injured and it became essential for those inside to come out of the hall and defend themselves. They did come up and forced the mob to retire into a district called The Glen (off Ballybricken) nearby. On reaching the Glen the Volunteers (mostly unarmed and some armed with sticks only) were attacked by the R.I.C. using rifles and fixed bayonets and forced to retreat to the Volunteer Hall. Many casualties were suffered by the Volunteers on that occasion. In this connection I would like to state that I met several of these men years afterwards, who had served in I.R.A. flying columns in Cork, Kerry and Tipperary, and they all told me that they would much prefer to repeat the service they had given in the I.R.A. columns rather than serve in an election campaign in Waterford. I might add here that the by-election of March 1918 was won by Captain Wm. Redmond who beat his Sinn Féin opponent - Dr. White - by nearly two to one.

During the period March to December 1918, D/Company carried out their usual weekly parades. I was an ordinary Volunteer at the time, holding no rank. I had a .22 rifle and used to have target practice with the company (about 30 strong) on Sunday mornings at Williamstown, about a mile south of the city, in an old barn known as "The Long House". This barn was about 60 yards long and afforded an ideal rifle range. Scouts were always posted in the vicinity when practice took place. This particular building was in constant use for rifle and general training by our company during the whole I.R.A. campaign and it says much for its location that it was never once raided by enemy forces.

The General Election of December 1918, as far as Waterford city was concerned, was a repeat of what happened in March of that year. There was the same mob law, supported by the alleged custodians of law and order, assaults on republicans

and all the features of the earlier by-election, with the result of the poll much the same, a victory for Captain Wm. Redmond and the ascendancy gang, ably assisted by the infamous Ballybricken pig-buyer fraternity, and the ex-British soldier gang. On this occasion Volunteers from outside counties were drafted into Waterford to help us in the republican election campaign, and on this particular matter I would like to comment.

It was, in my opinion at the time and it still is my opinion, that the bringing in of Volunteers from outside was bad policy from the local republican standpoint. I am convinced that this course of action was against the interests of Dr. White, the Sinn Féin candidate and a local man. It simply irritated the Redmondite mobs further, made the situation more difficult for the local Volunteers and minimised our chances of success in the parliamentary elections of March and December 1918. To illustrate my point I would refer to an election meeting held by Dr. White in my own district of Ballytruckle. About 30 yards or less from where the meeting was to be held, a platform was erected for the holding of a meeting at the same time the same evening by Captain Redmond. There were no more than a dozen of us local Volunteers lined up for protection duty near our platform when hundreds of Captain Redmond's supporters came marching by to attend his meeting, accompanied by bands and banners. As they passed our small party of Volunteers the mob jeered and cat-called, but, recognising us as local men, no attempt was made to assault us. If, on the other hand, we had a contingent of Volunteers from outside counties with us, I have no doubt that a battle royal would have taken place as happened elsewhere in the city on numerous occasions. The sight of outside men seemed to infuriate the Redmondite

mobs much more than the sight of Waterford men. It is also a rather significant fact that, just a year afterwards, i.e., in 1919, a municipal election was held in Waterford city which resulted in a resounding success for the Sinn Féin candidates. On this occasion no Volunteers from outside areas were brought in to the city and the result of the election speaks for itself and supports my assertion and my belief that it was bad policy to introduce Volunteers from areas outside Waterford to help in the fateful 1918 elections in that city.

During the year 1919 we still continued our Volunteer training routine and, having got rid of quite a number of men who joined during the threat of conscription 1918, and who didn't continue when that threat passed, we had a company strength of about 25 men. We still lacked arms and ammunition but I remember helping to fashion a large number of French bayonets into pike heads some time late in 1919. I don't know from where these bayonets originated, but I do recollect working many nights in the coach factory of Pierce Durand (himself an I.R.A. man) in Waterford, where there were machines for drilling and welding. We fitted handles to these pikes and turned out about 100 or so. I cannot say what ever became of the finished pikes, but I do know they were never used for the purpose originally intended.

Early in the year 1920, to be precise, on Easter Saturday night 1920, I received instructions from the Brigade to destroy Callaghane R.I.C. Barracks situated about four miles south east of the city on the Dunmore Road. The barracks was unoccupied, the garrison having been withdrawn into the city, possibly fearing an attack. Another member of D/Company named Frank O'Connor accompanied me. We brought out a few gallons of paraffin oil and got in to the building by a porch at the back. With the help of paper and some refuse we set fire to the building to prevent its reoccupation by enemy forces.

This was the first barracks burned in the East Waterford Brigade area.

Shortly afterwards, D/Company took part in a raid for arms at the premises of a Major Carew, Ballinamona, Waterford about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of the city. The raid took place at night and the party was in charge of Michael O'Neill, captain of D/Company. Others who took part were Wm. Winters, Miles Fanning, Sean Brett, Michael McGrath, Jimmy McGrath and myself. A few of the men were armed with shotguns and revolvers. I did not enter the house that night as I was well known to many of the staff. A few shotguns and a pair of binoculars were taken from Major Carew. He offered no opposition. The same night the same party raided the house of Major Carew's uncle, Commander Carew of Ballindud, a few miles away, but here we were unsuccessful in obtaining any arms.

During the first half of 1920, raids for arms on houses of people known to be unsympathetic to us were frequent. Such raids took place in the Killoteran area one mile west of the city, in the Grace Dieu district north of the city and in the Butlerstown area three miles west. These raids were carried out mainly by the mentioned mentioned in the previous paragraph, arms being carried on all occasions. We were successful in obtaining a few badly-needed shotguns which were put in the company dump.

f to
The arms dump was at Ballycordrea about two miles west of the city on the old road at Tramore. The dump comprised a long wooden box covered with felting. The box was placed in an excavation made in a bank of earth in a wood. The location was known only to Jimmy McGrath, then company captain, Lieut. Sean Brett, Volunteer Frank O'Connor and myself. The entrance to the dump was concealed by overhanging briars and bracken and was not discernible from the remainder of the fence. The weapons were cleaned and vaselined regularly and

the ammunition (mostly of the shotgun variety) and about 200 rounds of .303) was periodically examined. Some of this .303 ammunition was bought by us from British soldiers stationed in Waterford. Some .45 revolvers and ammunition (about four revolvers) were got by railwaymen from soldiers or British army officers travelling by train who might leave their kit bags unattended for a while, when the guns would be removed from the bags without the fact being noticed by the military.

In November 1920, I remember being instructed by our company captain, Jimmy McGrath, to get two rifles from the dump and to go with him to a place called Whitfield Wood, which overlooked the main Waterford-Cork road about 6 miles west of Waterford city. When we arrived there we found Jimmy Power of Ballycraddock, who was commandant of the 5th (Dunhill) Battalion of the East Waterford Brigade, in charge of a party of men, all armed with rifles. The names of these men, so far as I can now recollect, were:- Michael Bishop, Martin Cullinane, Richard Cullinane and James McGrath, all from the Dunhill Company, Paddy Keoghan of Tramore, and Michael Power of Tramore. We lay in ambush in Whitfield Wood from early morning until dusk, in anticipation of the passing of military lorries en route to or from Co. Cork. Convoys of British troops regularly passed that way, but, on this particular day, not a single lorry passed us. Jimmy Power, who was in charge, disbanded us when darkness came on and we returned towards Waterford where we dumped our arms in the usual place.

In the first week of 1921, I remember receiving instructions from the Eastern Brigade O/C., Paddy Paul, to collect any arms and ammunition from the various I.R.A. dumps in the city and to take them out to the Waterford Mental Hospital where they were cared for by two of the attendants at the hospital named William Gallagher and a man named Morris

both of whom were members of the local I.R.A. company. The arms and ammunition were put for safety into a hayshed in the grounds of the Mental Hospital until their distribution on the night of January 7th, 1921.

At about 7.30 p.m. on that night I paraded with about twenty men from the Waterford City Battalion at the Mental Hospital grounds. Vice Brigadier William Keane was in command. The names of some of those present are as follows: Jerry Cronin and Con Doogan, both lieutenants in A/Company; Michael Wyley A/Company; Captain Jimmy McGrath; Lieut. Sean Brett; Lieut. Myles Fanning; Volunteer Jim Heylin; Volunteer James Power; Vol. Nicholas Whittle; Vol. Michael McGrath; Volunteer Thomas Kiely; Vol. William Gallagher, all of D/Company. Captain James Morrissey, Vol. Pat Carroll; Vol. Michael Norris and Vol. Thomas O'Sullivan of 'F' (Ferrybank) Company. Vol. George Giles of C/Company. There were about 8 rifles in the party, the remainder had shotguns mostly; a few had revolvers only. Captain Jimmy McGrath, Vols. Jim Heylin, Jim Power and myself were each armed with a service rifle and about 20 rounds of ammunition.

We left the hospital grounds en route to Pickardstown, Tramore, about 8 p.m. The night was dark and wet. Because of my knowledge of the locality I was deputed to act as guide and I led the men across country at first for security reasons, to a point on the old Tramore road and thence by that road to the appointed place which was at the junction of the Ballynatter Road and the old and new Tramore Roads and about a mile east of the town of Tramore. We reached our destination about 10 p.m. and met the O/C. of the Eastern Brigade, Paddy Paul, and Pax Whelan, O/C. of the West Waterford Brigade. With Captain Jimmy McGrath, Vols. James Heylin and James Power, all of D/Coy. I was assigned to a position in the "V" formed by the junction of the old and new Tramore roads on the

eastern (Waterford city) side of the scene of the proposed ambush. The ambush was planned to take place near what is called "The Metal Bridge" which carries the railway line across the main Waterford-Tramore road. A barricade had been erected at the western side (Tramore side) of this bridge so that the ambush position could best be described as lying ~~between~~ between my position and the Metal Bridge, the intention being to attack the British when their lorries had all passed our position and had run up to the barricade, about 300 yards further on at the Metal Bridge. When ^{re} I was situated with the three other men named, I had a clear view from behind a hedge at the "V" referred to of the ambush position, as the ground on which we lay was a few feet over the road and we faced towards the bridge and the barricade.

On the left of our position was the Ballynatten Road which sloped sharply upwards from us and which was manned by a few men with rifles, some with shotguns and one or two with revolvers. On our right on the railway line was a party of shotgun men from the Dunhill (East Waterford) company and at the far side, i.e., the Tramore side of the bridge, a company of West Waterford Brigade were in position on high ground overlooking the barricade. I cannot give an accurate idea of the number of I.R.A. men there that night but I'm sure there were about 60 in all.

The plan of attack was as follows:- Some of our men were to stage a feint attack on the R.I.C. Barracks in Tramore with the view of drawing the British out from Waterford to the assistance of the garrison. When the British came into the ambush position already described, fire was to be opened by our men. The precise instructions given that night were that all enemy vehicles were to be permitted to enter the area between our position at the "V" and the Metal Bridge before a shot was fired. The shotgun men from Dunhill, who were

stationed on the railway line, were to open the action when the British had entered the trap.

About 11 p.m. we could hear shooting coming from the direction of Tramore, where our men were staging the feint attack on the R.I.C. barracks and, at the same time, we could see Verey lights going up from the barracks. About 11.30 p.m. I heard the roar of lorries coming from the direction of Waterford on the old Tramore road. They approached the junction of the Ballynatten-Old-New-Tramore roads on the left of our position as we lay facing the Metal Bridge. I am very definite about the route the British lorries took that night, although the night was dark I could see (and hear) them very close to the position I held with my three comrades; indeed we were better placed than any others of our men to know what was happening as we were closest to the enemy force at the "V" position.

One, or perhaps two, of the military lorries passed my position, going towards the Metal Bridge, and I could hear other lorries following. To the best of my recollection, two British lorries entered the ambush position. Immediately the first lorry approached the bridge it was fired on and that opened the engagement. At once the lights on the lorries were switched off, the military got out and took up positions on the sides of the road. Firing had been opened by our men on the Ballynatten road and by those on the railway line. I could hear the military advancing towards the junction, i.e. the "V", on foot down the old Tramore road and what, probably, was the voice of a British officer saying: "There is an ambush down here in the wood". We fired a volley at a lorry which came into view when a Verey light went up near it at the Metal Bridge. I believe that this Verey light was fired by the West Waterford men on the far side of the Metal Bridge. In view of the very precarious position in which we found

ourselves at the "V" post, orders were given to us to hold our fire and lie low. We ceased firing and lay quiet for about 10 minutes or so to allow the military who were just a few yards distant from us to pass down by our position and leave us a line of retreat. After some time, as the major part of the firing seemed to be directed away from our position and up towards Ballynatten (on our left), we decided to pull out and try to contact the main body of I.R.A. on the Ballynatten hill as I knew that was their only line of retreat.

The four members of our party retreated under cover of a fence for about 300 yards in the field which formed a "V" at its apex and adjoined the old Tramore road. We crossed this road and found that the British lorries had moved on down close to the ambush position where the firing was still intense. We went up the hill on the north east side of the Ballynatten road under heavy machine gunfire from the British who were now in a position much lower down near the junction of the roads and who were beginning to fan out and advance up a slope of ground on the south west side of the Ballynatten road in an effort to outflank our men on that road. On reaching the top of Ballynatten Hill and failing to locate any of our men, I pushed on over the top and came down on to the Ballynatten Road about a mile, or perhaps a little more, from the ambush position. Again we failed to contact any of our men who had, apparently, retreated in the darkness in a north-easterly direction towards the Dunmore East-Waterford area. There was nothing left for us to do then but to make the best of our way a cross country to Waterford. This we did, without meeting any of the enemy (nor did we meet any of our boys) and we arrived back in the grounds of the Waterford Mental Hospital about 6-a.m. on 8.1.1921. There we dumped our arms and made our separate ways home.

I would here like to comment very briefly on what has now come to be known as the Tramore ambush. In my opinion, the ambush position selected was altogether unsuitable for the purposes of a night attack. When the British left their lorries they had ample cover from our fire which, owing to the darkness, could not find an effective target when the lights on the lorries went out. In addition, our men on the Ballynatten Road, who bore the brunt of the British fire, had no knowledge of the terrain which formed their line of retreat. As a result, this body of men were, in my view, fortunate to escape heavier casualties. They did lose two men killed and two wounded.

During the day of 8th January 1921, news of the ambush was all over the city of Waterford. Various stories were told of the numbers killed and wounded on both sides. Actually, we lost Michael McGrath of Waterford city, and Tom O'Brien of Dunhill killed, and Mick Wyley and Nicholas Whittle of Waterford city, wounded. I never heard how the British fared, but I believe they had only a couple of men wounded.

On the same evening word reached me that Mick Wyley was lying wounded in the house of a man named Corcoran, at Kilmacleague, about six miles east of Tramore, and that another of our men, Nicholas Whittle, was wounded also and in the home of his cousin, Paddy Whittle of Ballygarron, about four miles south east of Waterford. I made arrangements for the transport of the two men to the Waterford Mental Hospital where they were to be taken, on the instructions of Brigade O/C. Paul. I then went by bicycle to Corcoran's house having previously contacted a man named Martin Whittle, who provided a pony and trap driven by himself, to take away the two wounded men. We reached Wyley first. He had suffered a flesh wound in both his legs and had a bullet in them. He was in great pain. We carried him into the trap and made

him as comfortable as we could. We then went on to the house of Patrick Whittle where we found Nicholas Whittle sitting in the kitchen. He was very weak and feeble as a result of three bullet wounds in the body and his efforts to get away from the scene of the ambush without being captured. This man actually walked four miles in his badly wounded state before reaching his cousin's house. Both Wyley and Whittle were fighting with the men on the Ballynatten road. I should state that both McGrath and O'Brien, who were killed, were also in position on the Ballynatten road.

We put Whittle into the trap with Wyley and I went on ahead about 50 yards on my bicycle to watch out for approaching enemy forces. The pony and trap reached the Mental Hospital safely and the two wounded men were taken in by the hospital staff many of whom were I.R.A. men. I should pay a tribute to Tom Dunne, the head attendant, and William Baldwin, the night charge-hand, who were opposed politically to us, but I can safely say that no two men could have looked after the wounded as well as they did. Whittle's wounds were particularly serious, one exit wound was about the size of the palm of a man's hand and was most troublesome to dress. Two bullets were removed from him in the Mental Hospital, but one other could not be located, and I believe that he still carries that bullet in his body to this day.

Rev. Fr. Whittle, a priest on the English mission, and a brother to Nicholas, came home to Waterford on learning of, what he believed to be, his brother's death. We heard that the British thought Whittle was dead and had been taken away for burial by his comrades. It was decided, then, by the Brigade staff to publicly announce this man's death to throw the British off the scent. Prayers for the repose of his soul were offered up in the city churches and his parents (who were aware he was alive) closed their business premises in mourning for him.

Meanwhile word came out from the Mental Hospital that the wounded men had been seen by someone who was considered untrustworthy, so it was decided to move Wyley and Whittle in case the news of their whereabouts got to the British and to get them out to the house of a friend named Mrs. Robert Power of ~~Cullyhane~~, Waterford, about two miles east of the city. In my efforts to contact Brigade O/C. Paddy Paul, I met, by chance, a man from Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny, who told me of an impending raid the same night on Mullinavat Barracks. We, therefore took the opportunity to move the wounded men while the enemy were diverted towards Mullinavat and, in a motor car supplied by Pierce Durand of Waterford, himself an I.R.A. man, Willie Keane, Brigade Vice Commandant, and myself got the two men out of the hospital and took them to Mrs. Power's. An I.R.A. man from Traimore named Power drove the car. The following morning the hospital was raided by British military. Wyley and Whittle were about a fortnight in the Mental Hospital before we decided to move them.

The house of Mrs. Power in Callaghane was wellknown to all I.R.A. men. She was a widow and a very good supporter of ours. Her home was always available for any I.R.A. men on the run. She had a workman named Paddy Kennedy, a hunchback. Paddy was intelligence officer for the district and an excellent man at his job. His deformity permitted him to go places which would have aroused suspicion otherwise.

Some word of military activity in the neighbourhood came to Mrs. Power and she suggested that Wyley and Whittle be moved for safety elsewhere. The local commandant, named Bobby Bugent, and myself took the two

Callaghane

men in a pony trap to the house of a man named Butler of Licawn, a mile from Dunmore East. They stayed in Butler's one night only when we took them by car a mile eastwards to Mrs. Ivory's house in Ballyglan. Mrs. Ivory had two sons in the I.R.A. The men remained in Ivory's a few days whilst I consulted with Paddy Paul, the Brigade O/C., as to the safest place to put them up. It was feared that the British were on their trail and the constant movement from place to place retarded their chances of recovery. It was eventually decided to shift the wounded men across the river Suir to the home of a family named Walsh of Portnascully Mills, Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny.

One late afternoon, Paddy Paul and I brought the two men by car owned by Pierce Durand and driven by .. Power of Tramore to the banks of the Suir, at a point known as Whelan's Bridge, near Kilmeaden, about six miles west of Waterford. We were met at the river side by James (Jim Pak) Fitzpatrick of Moonveen, who took Wyley and Whittle across the river. I went with them to Walsh's house and stayed with them for some days, afterwards visiting them regularly. They received medical attention from Miss Walsh of Portnascully, who was a nurse and who is now my wife. The time was early in February 1921, but about mid-March, the Brigade decided that Whittle should be sent across to England for safety; so, one morning I accompanied him in a pony and trap to Kilmacow Station, Co. Kilkenny, where he travelled to Dublin and across to England. Whittle subsequently recovered from his wounds and returned to Waterford after the Truce in July 1921. Wyley recovered at Portnascully and came back to join the East Waterford flying column on its formation, a month or so before the truce.

Following the Tramore ambush my own home at Ballytruckle, Waterford, was repeatedly raided by military and I had to live elsewhere; however, I did periodically go home notwithstanding the danger of raids.

Sometime early in March 1921, an attempt was made to rescue prisoners from Ballybricken jail. I cannot now remember who was to be rescued, but I think it was some Kilkenny men. The escape plan was this. At a certain time, on a certain day, at a particular part of the gaol wall, a rubber ball bearing an 'all clear' message would be bounced over the gaol wall by the prisoners at recreation inside. On receipt of that message I was deputed to throw a line (weighted) over the wall to which a rope ladder was attached. The line and the ladder would be pulled in by the prisoners and the escape would then take place. I was there at the appointed time with the Vice-Brigadier, Willie Keane, and some others whose names I cannot remember. The ball came over the wall as arranged, but it had a message attached (on paper) saying that the escape was impossible. I learned afterwards that, due to some unforeseen incident, such as the alteration in the time of the changing the military guard, or for some suchlike reason, the attempt to escape had to be called off by the prisoners themselves.

Approaching the end of the month of March 1921, the West Waterford Brigade had staged an ambush at Durrow, Co. Waterford, and were being hard pressed by British troops from Waterford city, Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel. Pierce Durand told me about this state of affairs and asked if anything could be done to relieve the strain on the West Waterford men. In consultation with the brigade staff, it was decided to arrange a series of minor engagements as a diversionary move. As a result, every I.R.A. company in Waterford city and districts within a radius of five miles took part in the cutting of telephone wires from barracks, blowing up bridges, blocking roads with fallen trees and trenching main roads to give the impression of some big move on foot. At the same time, Paddy Paul asked me to bring a couple of hundred rounds

of .303 ammunition to the West Waterford men at Dungarvan from our own dump. I delivered the stuff to Pax Whelan in Dungarvan and was returning to Waterford by train when I was told that the train on which I proposed to travel was carrying British troops and it would be ambushed at a level crossing called Carroll's Cross, a bout ten miles west of Waterford. My instructions were to flash a lamp from the train as it came near Connell's Cross to signal that there were, in fact, troops on board. As we came near to the level crossing I gave the arranged signal. I expected the train to stop, assuming that the railway signals would be set accordingly and the crossing gates closed. The gates were, in fact, closed, but the train dashed through them and continued on into Waterford. No ambush took place.

In the month of April 1921, an order came down from G.H.Q. that all bicycle shops be raided for bicycles. This was done to secure some sort of transport for I.R.A. men moving about the country. The use of motors was prohibited without a permit from the military authorities, as indeed were bicycles; but, of course, a bike could be used with less chance of being noticed, especially at night. A large number of bicycles were taken from dealers in Waterford city, brought to a safe place outside the city and subsequently transferred to the country battalions.

About this time I was appointed Vice-Commandant of the 4th Battalion, East Waterford Brigade. The brigade officers were: Brigade O/C. P. Paul; Vice O/C. Willie Keane; Brigade I.O. Denis Madden; Brigade Adjutant Tom Wyley; Brigade Q.M. Matthew Knox. The battalion, of which I was vice-commandant, was approximately 130 strong. It was also (at this time) decided to form a flying column composed mostly of men on the run. Paddy Paul was O/C. and some of the other members, including myself, were: Jerry Cronin, Ml. Wyley (wounded in

the Tramore ambush), Sean Edwards (later shot in Kilkenny gaol during the civil war), Pat Carroll, Michael Norris, Michael Cahill, Willie O'Donoghue and Frank O'Connor. There were others, whose names I cannot now remember. We were about twenty in all.

An event occurred about this period (May 1921) to which I would like to refer. Due to dissatisfaction amongst the men with certain actions of some members of the Brigade staff, the five battalions of the East Waterford Brigade sent representatives to a special meeting called to appoint new brigade officers. At that meeting, Michael Power of Tramore was appointed Brigade O/C.; Michael Bishop vice-brigadier; Thomas Wyley, brigade adjutant; and Denis Madden brigade I.O. Apparently G.H.Q. in Dublin was apprised of what had happened because the next thing we knew was that the eastern and western brigades were amalgamated under Pax Whelan as O/C. Paddy Paul, the former O/C. of the Eastern Brigade, was appointed training instructor to the flying column.

In May 1921, in accordance with instructions issued from G.H.Q., a general policy of harassing enemy movements was begun. On the last Saturday in May of that year I went out to Holycross (which is on the main Waterford-Cork road about three miles west of Waterford) with a party of men from the battalion. We divided the men into groups to cut trees across the main road and to trench and blow up road bridges. Scouts were put out while all this was going on, over a wide area, and the operation had ended about 4 a.m. and the men dismissed, when I sent one of my men named Stafford to dismiss three scouts I had placed in the vicinity of Holycross. Stafford returned after a short while and told me that a scout named John O'Rourke, a member of D/Company, was lying at his post, shot by British officers who had surprised him. Stafford also said that two other scouts on outpost duty not far from O'Rourke had left their positions before orders for their dismissal had arrived.

I went immediately to where O'Rourke lay on the ground. I asked him what had occurred and he told me that three British officers, one or two of whom were in mufti, had come down the road; one of them shot him (O'Rourke) and, as he lay on the ground, the other two fired into him. O'Rourke was quite conscious at the time and when I first reached him he had his rosary beads in his hands and was praying. I went to a nearby house, pulled a door off an outhouse to make a stretcher and called a few of our men to help in carrying him. We brought him to Butlerstown Castle which was only partially occupied (by a sympathiser of ours). The occupant, named Michael O'Connor, got his family out of bed and got a bed ready for O'Rourke. Meanwhile, I had sent to Waterford for a priest and doctor, as I realised that the poor fellow was in bad shape. Later on that day, Father Hackett of St. John's College, Waterford, came out, as did Dr. Phil Purcell. John O'Rourke later that evening was carried on an improvised stretcher of poles and coats to the house of Fr. Crotty, the curate in Fenor, six miles away, where it was hoped to have an operation performed, but O'Rourke died en route. He was interred, temporarily, in the cemetery at Reisk and after the Truce in July 1921, his body was disinterred and buried in the republican plot in Ballygunner, Waterford.

In or about June 2nd, 1921, I was instructed to notify members of the brigade staff of a meeting of the brigade to be held in Waterford. I went to Nugent's of Ballinkina, Dunmore East, to notify Bobby Nugent. He wasn't at home, so I wrote a note telling him of the meeting. I then changed my mind. I told his sister to let him know about the meeting and put the note in my pocket. I then went on to Mrs. Power's house in Callaghane where I had stayed many another night and where we kept Whittle and Wyley for a few weeks after the Tramore ambush. I was awakened at daybreak by a British

officer who had already been through all my belongings and discovered the note I had written to Bobby Nugent. The officer told me to get up and dress. Paddy Kennedy, the hunchback workman, for Mrs. Power, was arrested with me. I was taken to the military barracks, Waterford, and placed in solitary confinement. After about a week like that I was interrogated by a Lieut. Yeo of the Devonshire Regiment and was subjected to considerable abuse and assault by him for failing to give him the information he asked for. This man, Yeo, was a notorious blackguard and attempts had been made previously by our men to shoot him, but these attempts, unfortunately, failed. I was then tried by field general courtmartial and sentenced to 12 months in jail. After a week or so I was transferred to Waterford gaol and thence to Kilkenny gaol to complete my term of imprisonment.

X I was still in Kilkenny gaol in November 1921, when some of us made up our minds to try and escape. In the basement of the gaol were old punishment cells which were unused and never visited by the prison authorities. It was decided to dig a tunnel through the floor of one of these old cells and continue it on under the main wall of the prison about 10 or 15 yards away. With the aid of pokers, knives and any sharp instrument we could lay hands on we began the job. The work was done mostly between dusk and the time for locking up cells, which was 10 p.m., and we worked in relays. Bits of board were used to prop up the sides of the tunnel. The earth we took out was thrown into a few of the old cells which, as I have said, were never visited by the prison authorities.

About 8.30 p.m. on a dark November night in 1921, the escape was made. Forty-three men got away, the preference being given to men who had previously been in Spike Island, Cork, and who had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The escape route led into one of the city streets from where

we dispersed in small groups to the open country. Military lorries were out scouring the roads for signs of the men who got away, but without avail. Some of the Kilkenny City I.R.A., who were expecting the escape, were on the alert and they directed us towards Dunamaggin and thence to Hugginstown, Co. Kilkenny. My companions that night were Sean Quilter, Tralee, Paddy Power of Clonea, Frank Pine, Tommy O'Halloran of Ballyporeen, Ned Punch of Limerick (sentenced for life) and Willie O'Meara of Carrick-on-Suir.

The following day we got across into Co. Waterford to Shanakill, where there happened to be an I.R.A. training camp in charge of Jim Gilmartin of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade. We stayed there a few days and I then returned to Walsh's of Portnascully, Mooncoin. I remained a week or so at Walsh's and came on in to my home at Waterford. I reported for duty with my battalion but was told to keep out of the way for some time yet. I was in the house of our good friend, Mrs. Power of Callaghane (where I was arrested) when the treaty was signed on 6th December 1921.

Signed: Thomas Brennan

Date: 24-2-55

Witness: J. O'Connell

Investigator.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILÉTA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1104