

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ M'ÉLÉNA

No. W.S. 1110

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,110

Witness

Captain Peter Browne,
Ballymullen,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.

Identity.

Captain Scartaglin Company Irish volunteers,
Co. Kerry, 1913 - ;

Officer i/c. scouting and dispatches 1st
Battalion, Kerry No. 2 Brigade.

Subject.

- (a) Tralee, Easter Week 1916;
- (b) 1st Battalion Kerry No. 2 Brigade,
1917-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY CAPTAIN PETER BROWNE,

Tralee, Co. Kerry.

(Formerly of Scartaglin).

1913:

I joined the Volunteers in Tralee in the winter of 1913. The parade hall was then at the Rink, Basin View. Parades were held weekly, with route marches on Sundays. Training was carried on under the supervision of British Army reserve N.C.O.s and men. It included close and extended order, foot drill and arms drill with wooden rifles. Lectures and talks on various military subjects were given, including first-aid, scouting, military intelligence.

Each Volunteer on joining was given a membership card and subscribed two pence each week towards the purchase of a rifle. His attendances at parades were marked up weekly on the card. There were four companies of upwards of 100 men in the town of Tralee, which was the headquarters of a battalion as well as being the headquarters of the Volunteers throughout the whole county of Kerry. Each parish had its own unit organised on company lines, viz. half companies and sections.

1914:

The organisation was in full swing in the early months of 1914 and into the autumn. The Redmondite split, as it became known, had a serious effect on the strength of the unit about this time. It was in the autumn of 1914 that it effected the Volunteers generally at a full parade of the Tralee Battalion/ speakers for both sides

addressed the Volunteers. There was the usual excitement and flags of all kinds were on the parade. Tom C'Donnell, M.P. for Kerry, was the principal speaker for the Redmondite side viz, to support Britain in the Great War. Austin Stack, Tom Slattery and others put the I.R.B. side. Of course the majority of the Volunteers present did not know then of the I.R.B. influence in the organisation. The war-cry was Ireland versus England. Those who supported the different viewpoints were asked to fall in at separate places in the hall. Some of the companies were scarcely affected, but the company to which I belonged - 'C', drawn from the centre of the town, comprised mostly of clerks and businessmen, went almost completely in favour of Redmond's policy. Out of about 80 present, there were only about four of us who carried on as we were. These four, and some who were absent that night, were merged with other companies and 'C' Company became defunct. The town portion of the battalion henceforth had three companies, 'A' (Boherbee), 'B' (Strand St.) and 'D' (Rock St.).

There was considerable opposition between the two bodies of Volunteers from then on to 1916. The Redmondites or National Volunteers as they became known, had about 130 Volunteers in the town, and they had weekly parades and route marches similar to the Irish Volunteers as our units were called. Recruiting for the two units was intense, and when they met on route marches there was ample evidence of the bitterness between them.

Austin Stack was in charge of the Irish Volunteers from the start and Alf Cotton, who had lost his job in Belfast due to his association with the movement, came to Kerry in 1914 as organiser.

1915:

The training and organisation of the force was poor in 1915. The split affected us badly in places and some parish units ceased to exist or dwindled down to a few. The National President of the Irish Volunteers, Eoin McNeill, reviewed the Kerry Volunteers in Killarney in the summer of 1915. It was the first big gathering of Kerry Volunteers at one centre. It was a very big parade, several thousand strong. Arms were still scarce. What we had were mostly single shot rifles of the Mauser and Lee Enfield type and a few Lee Enfield magazine rifles. I received a single shot Lee Enfield in the autumn of 1915. I think it was in 1915 that P.H. Pearse also addressed the Volunteers in Tralee sports' field.

1916:

The training of the force was much the same in the early months of 1916 as in the previous years - weekly parades, route marches, skirmishes (night and day), no range practice except indoor miniature practice with .22 rifle, no grenade practice. Apart from rumours and whisperings of things to happen, the average Volunteer had no official inkling of anything big coming off. The week before Easter Sunday all Volunteers received orders to take two days' rations and full kit and be prepared to camp out for the week-end. On Holy Thursday we were issued with knapsacks at the Rink for the purpose of taking rations and blankets on Sunday's route march.

On Good Friday I cycled to Scartaglin. Everything was calm in Tralee when I left at about 10 a.m. On returning in the evening at about 6 p.m. I encountered a number of R.I.C. heading towards Tralee from Gortatlea

and other small stations. In Tralee there was excitement. An order awaited me to report to Volunteer headquarters with full equipment. There was a full parade. I then learned that Austin Stack was in the police station, where he had gone at the request of the Head Constable, that there was a stranger in the barracks who wanted to speak to him. The stranger was, of course, Roger Casement, who had been picked up by the R.I.C. at Banna Strand that morning.

Stack's arrest and the absence of Alf Cotton, said to be next in command, who went to Belfast earlier in the week, supposedly to see a sick mother, left the Volunteers in a leaderless position in Kerry. Of course at that time we (the average Volunteer) did not know that or know what was happening. We had our Battalion and Company Officers and with their limited knowledge were prepared for any eventuality. On Good Friday night there were all sorts of rumours: - we were going to rescue Stack (we did not know then about Casement being a prisoner) and take the military barracks.

On Easter Saturday the papers contained news of the car going into the Laune at Ballykissane Pier, Killorglin. The occupants were on their way to remove a broadcasting set from Waterville to Bollard, Tralee.

On Sunday we got orders to fall in and the battalion was marched through the town. When passing Mary St., McCowen's houses and other lanes, we were met by a barrage of dirt and abuse from the relatives of the British soldiers serving in France. There were several clashes and the Volunteers charged at the double through each of the lanes in turn, the butts of the rifles being

used with effect.

On the Saturday morning I saw an escort of police taking a tall man through the Mall to the station. I did not know then that he was Casement. As I went up the Mall there were several dozen women and children from the McCowen houses spitting and jeering at the prisoner. At their head was Mrs. Powell (mother of Eugene Powell) and her children. (Did the secret service pass the word around to cause these demonstrations?). Wild rumours were floating around but everything was quiet.

To get to the Sunday. All Volunteers had mobilised at the Rink for two days' camp as ordered. They paraded in the sports' field. Units from outside the town were also present, including Volunteers from Castlegregory and Dingle who had marched in the previous night. The day was very wet, a continuous downpour. There was no shelter in the sports' field except a large marquee with the water dripping through it. The Sunday Independent had carried an order from Eoin McNeill cancelling the Sunday parade order. This confused matters for all Volunteers and had a big effect on the number that took part in the Rising.

We spent some hours in the sports' field and we then marched back to the Rink, and late that night we were marched as far as the Mile-height, still in a downpour. We understood afterwards that the purpose of the latter parade was to get Monteith, who had landed with Casement on Banna Strand, out of Tralee and hand him over to the Ballymacelligott Volunteers for safety. The two day camp was cancelled and we were all dismissed.

It later transpired that the sinking of the 'Aud' had completely upset the plans locally and nationally, also that our mission in Kerry on Easter Sunday was to receive the 'Aud' at Fenit and unload her and give protection to the removal of the cargo. What the plans for this were never came to light. Years later I interviewed Paddy Cahill (who was senior officer in Tralee when Stack was arrested) on behalf of Florrie O'Donoghue of Cork to make an appointment for him. Florrie was at the time compiling a history of Easter Week and he supposed that Paddy Cahill, being senior after Stack's arrest, should be able to throw light on the whole movement in the south. I made the appointment, but due to the sudden illness of Paddy Cahill, from which he did not recover, Florrie was unable to interview him. On the occasion I made the appointment I discussed the Easter Week period a little with him. I did not go into matters closely as I expected Florrie would be doing that.

Paddy Cahill told me that he had no knowledge of the major plans for Kerry when Stack was arrested. His rank on the Good Friday, he told me, was Battalion Adjutant. He knew there were arms to be landed. He expected them on Easter Sunday. His task was to seize Fenit R.I.C. barracks and make the pier at Fenit safe for the landing of arms. He blamed Alf Cotton who should know about the boat, and implied that Cotton was intentionally absent from Kerry on the occasion, also that Cotton was met in Dublin by some of the Volunteers on Easter Monday when he was supposed to be on his way to Kerry. Cotton neither returned to Kerry nor took part in the Rising. If there were plans for the Rising they must have been kept very quiet as far as Kerry was concerned. There were

certainly some drivers and firemen of Tralee under orders to run trains, but where to or where from has not transpired.

What was to happen in Tralee with a large military and police force while the ship was being unloaded?

Were the garrison to be captured first or were they to be besieged?

Certainly they could not be ignored as all trains from Fenit must pass through Tralee.

On the last occasion on which I was speaking to Paddy Cahill I asked him if he ever thought of writing up an account of the Rising as it effected Kerry. He told me he had done that and given it to Mrs. Austin Stack who was writing a book on Austin's life. Mrs. Stack was questioned about this some time after Paddy's death and she stated she had not received any matter from Paddy Cahill concerning the Rising.

Easter Monday was quiet in Tralee. In the afternoon rumours of fighting in Dublin filtered through. The Volunteers were mobilised on Monday night and it looked like as if Kerry Volunteers were going into action. However, a night guard of Volunteers at the Rink was called for and all other Volunteers were dismissed with instructions to be ready at short notice. I volunteered for guard duty and was one of about twenty that formed the guard. All responsible Volunteer officers slept in the Rink. Nothing unusual happened throughout the night. Scouts were coming and going all night and dispatch riders from country units that were mobilised were continually bringing messages from their units to

headquarters. Terence MacSwiney was said to be in Tralee on Monday discussing the situation with F. Cahill.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday passed off quietly. The Park was full of Volunteers at all times and wild rumours were afloat about Dublin and other places.

On Friday there were rumours of a surrender in Dublin. These came through loyalist sources and were mostly doubted. They were confirmed at Volunteer headquarters on Friday night. A meeting was arranged between the local British military officer and some Tralee citizens, including the clergy, which was attended by Volunteer representatives who agreed, in order to avoid arrests, to surrender all arms and ammunition to the military on or before Saturday. Similar meetings were held in other counties in the south and Terence MacSwiney is said to have been in communication with Kerry on the matter, a similar agreement having been made in Cork City.

A full parade of Volunteers was held on Friday night. All in possession of arms were instructed to hand them up to their officers to be surrendered to the British military authorities. No rifle was to be handed up sound. Volunteers and officers could be seen all over the hall with hammers or sledges smashing their rifles. I did not like to part with my rifle though only a single shot. I refused to break it or hand it up. I asked one of my officers, who was about to smash a magazine rifle, if he would exchange with me. He indignantly refused to do this and said I was disobeying an order. I quietly put my rifle inside my coat and took it to where I worked at 23, The Mall, where it was hidden away safely and greased until 1920 when it came in very useful for the barrack attacks.

Easter Saturday confirmed the news from Dublin. The fighting was over. Locally everything was quiet. The Volunteer force came to an end for the time being.

The surrender of the rifles did not prevent arrests. All the week following the R.I.C. and military were house searching and arresting Volunteer leaders. The true account of what happened in Dublin was coming through and the people, who before took the Volunteers with a smile, changed completely. They were magnificent when the Dublin leaders were executed. It was difficult to believe the change. A new Ireland had been born.

Kerry Volunteers have been criticised a good deal by people outside the county for (1) not rescuing Casement when he was a prisoner in Kerry and (2) not contacting the German boat (The Aud) when it was off the Kerry coast on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. These people overlook the fact that according to the best authorities the boat was not due in to Kerry until Easter Sunday and that the mistake made between the I.R.B. headquarters in the U.S.A. and Germany was responsible for it lying in Kerry waters before the appointed time. They also ignore the fact that the Kerry Volunteers were working under directions from G.H.Q. and any changes of plans for the Rising on Sunday would be for Dublin to make. Then there was no official information that the boat seen in the bay by some was the arms' boat. It is now well known that Casement came over to stop the Rising because of the small amount of arms he received. No one in Kerry expected Casement and least of all the officers.

It would have been quite simple to take Casement from Ardfert police or from the side-car which brought him

into Tralee or from Tralee R.I.C. barracks on Good Friday night, or when he was marched through the town on Saturday on his way to the railway or on the long trip to Dublin by train, if it were known he was Casement and if Dublin had ordered it. Dublin Volunteer headquarters knew Casement was arrested. They did not want to interfere with the plans made for Sunday and took no action.

After the surrender in Dublin and the arrests throughout the country of the Volunteers leaders with martial law in force everything was quiet. The Volunteers as a military force had ceased to exist. The majority of the leaders who survived the executions were in gaol. All meetings, sports and assemblies were suppressed. For once nationalist Ireland seemed to be of one mind. Those who publicly or privately condemned the Rising were quickly shunned. The spirit of the old battles for independence mingled with the new spirit through the medium of the poets and ballad singers.

Most of the Volunteers arrested after the Rising were released by the spring of 1917, and with their release was a re-awakening of the Volunteer spirit. Quietly at first the old companions began to organise and by sections met in some secluded place weekly to carry out military training and receive instructions and lectures.

Kerry had a big parade to Banna (Casement's Fort) in August 1917 on the anniversary of Casement's execution. This was the first public parade of the Kerry Volunteers since 1916. There were units from every parish in the county. Several thousand marched from Tralee and other centres, as well as those who came distances by all

modes of conveyance. The English jails had practically emptied themselves of the political or Sinn Féin prisoners as they were called by the press, and only a few of the outstanding 1916 leaders were still inside. The Volunteers were mustered near the Fort at Banna in a big field and were addressed by about six different speakers, including Thos. Ashe, F. Lynch and Frank Fahy.

1918:

The beginning of 1918 saw the Volunteers growing in strength and drilling openly. I was a Section Leader in Rock St. Company. The old officers were mostly attached to the Battalion Staff and early in 1918 I was acting Company Captain. Company parades were held weekly. Company staffs met weekly and considered reports from the section leaders on the sections' attendances, recruiting and training.

In 1918 I was sworn into the I.R.B. in Tralee. The meeting took place at No. 4 The Square over the A.O.H. rooms. There were four others present in the Circle besides myself, and Johnny Sullivan (killed near the Spa, Tralee, in 1922) was also sworn in the same night. There were no instructions and the ceremony was a simple one.

The organisation throughout the county was catching on. Most of the parishes had units. The county at this period consisted of one Brigade, comprising the Battalions Tralee, Killarney, Listowel, Dingle, Castleisland, Kenmare, Castlegregory, Caherciveen and Killorglin.

Conscription, which had been passed in the English Parliament, gave the Volunteer force a wonderful boost in

the summer of 1918. All sections of the people incited against its application to Ireland and speakers stressed the necessity for the Volunteers to be prepared to resist it openly. The threat of conscription drove hundreds into the Volunteer force everywhere and in the eyes of the people it became the National Army. In Tralee, for example, the Volunteers were policing the streets for the Corpus Christi procession that year, and in other centres throughout Ireland there was ample evidence on similar lines of the people having lost confidence in John Bull's army and police force.

In the early part of 1918 when it appeared that conscription might be enforced in Ireland the Volunteers were ordered to procure all fire-arms, and as the vast majority of the owners of guns were either in the Volunteers or in sympathy with them there was little to be done except to instruct them to put them in safety in case the British forces would attempt to collect them. Where, however, there was any doubt as to the reliability of an owner, a few armed (and in some cases masked) men visited the house and took possession of the weapons.

In the spring of 1918 while on an arms collecting mission, about six Volunteers of the Ballymacelligott Company decided to seize the arms at Gortatlea R.I.C. barracks. The station contained a sergeant and three men. On the night of the raid two R.I.C. men were seen leaving the station on patrol, and two Volunteers were instructed to watch their movements while the other four held up the two R.I.C. men left in the post and capture the rifles and revolvers which were known to be there. The patrol

having gone a distance along the main road, the observers returned to the raiding party and reported all clear. The Volunteers held up the two R.I.C. in the barracks and were searching for arms and ammunition. They were on the point of departure when fire was opened on them from the outside through the windows. Two of the Volunteers were seriously wounded and were carried by their comrades to an adjoining house, where they both died within a few hours. They were H. Laide and Jack Browne.

There was considerable police and military activity following the raid on Gortatlea and the R.I.C. were giving evidence against some local Volunteers. The case was up for hearing in Tralee Court in June and two members of the Fallymacelligott Company made a daring attempt at shooting on the Mall, Tralee, two of the R.I.C. men appearing as witnesses. Thomas McEllistram and Jack Cronin, who had been in the raid on Gortatlea and had been on the run since then, stationed themselves in a public-house on the Mall. They had two snotguns in a sack. They had scouts stationed near the Courthouse to advise them as to the route from the court the R.I.C. men would take when the court adjourned for lunch. The scouts reported that the R.I.C. men were walking down the main street (Edward St., the Mall). As the R.I.C. were passing the public-house where the Volunteers were the Volunteers stepped out on to the street and were in the act of opening fire at point blank range when a woman got in their line of fire. When she had passed they opened fire, but by this time the R.I.C. were almost out of the line of fire. However, both the R.I.C. men were wounded although they made their way back to the barracks.

There was considerable R.I.C. and military

activity after this. Martial law was proclaimed in Tralee and for a couple of months no one could leave the area without a permit from the military authorities. Jack Cronin and Thomas McEllistrim, who had carried out the attack in Tralee, were on the run and were being searched for night and day. They had several narrow escapes but were never captured.

In December 1918, the Great War being over, there was a general election in Ireland. The Sinn Féin organisation decided to contest every seat. They had already succeeded in winning two or three by-elections from the Redmondite party. The record of the Redmondite Party as recruiting agents for England during the war was now telling against them and Sinn Féin, pledged to a policy of abstention from the English Parliament, was sweeping them out of public life. Several Members of Parliament sensed the feeling and decided to stand down, allowing the Sinn Féin candidates to be returned unopposed. This happened in a number of constituencies. The four Sinn Féin candidates for Kerry were returned unopposed and Volunteers were asked from the Kerry Battalion to assist in other constituencies where the Sinn Féin organisation was weak. Waterford City was one of these and about a dozen Volunteers were sent from most Kerry Battalions to assist in the election there. I was sent with the Castleisland Battalion contingent.

There was no organisation by Sinn Féin in Waterford worth while. It was a stronghold of Redmond and the people were physically hostile to the Volunteers and Sinn Féin workers in the election. The R.I.C. and military gave the Redmond Party support and the Volunteers had to arm themselves with home-made batons about 1½ feet long.

The Volunteers acted as escorts for the Sinn Féin canvassers, protected election rooms throughout the City and the party headquarters at Power's Hotel. There were several hundreds of Volunteers in from Kerry, Clare and parts of Cork and Tipperary where there were no elections. The feeling was so bitter that a lone Volunteer seen on the street would be "mopped up". There were several clashes with the R.I.C. in baton charges and the houses or assembly rooms of the Sinn Féin supporters showed all the signs of being bombed out after a Redmondite parade had passed.

Ballybricken was the hottest spot and many of the Volunteers had bruises to remember it. Waterford was one of the seats retained by Redmond. There was a complete wash-out of the Redmondite party generally and Sinn Féin had soon the vast majority of seats.

Early in 1919 the newly elected members of Sinn Féin assembled in the Mansion House in Dublin and elected a Republican Government, known since as the First Dáil Éireann. The government consisted of President, Vice President and the several Ministers of State. This all Irish Parliament, representing the majority of the Irish people (it was not attended by the Unionist or a few others who had contested the election against Sinn Féin), was proclaimed as an illegal body. The result was that the new government was driven underground, its members had to go on the run and its meetings had to be held in secret. It quickly made itself known to the world in a number of ways. It floated a public loan, known as the Dáil Éireann Loan. It set up courts of justice, appointed envoys to countries of importance and established a police force (voluntary). The Volunteers swore

allegiance to the new government and became the Irish Republican Army or I.R.A.

The threat of conscription having passed over with the end of the Great War in 1918, the strength of the Volunteers had noticeably decreased by early 1919. Some parish units fell away completely, while most parishes were able to muster only from twelve to twenty men. These carried out training of a sort weekly. Except for a few important officers, or members of An Dáil who were on the run, things were mostly marking time.

At this time I was attached to Scartaglin Company. John Kerins was Company Captain as well as being organiser for Sinn Féin and the Dáil Éireann Loan throughout the county. I was second in command of the company.

The Battalion O/C was Dan O'Mahony, Castleisland. An old man of sixty to sixty-five years of age, he had connections with the land agitation in his young days and went to South Africa on the run from the police in the eighties. He had served with the Boers in the Boer War and was said to be next in command to Stack in Kerry in 1916. For these reasons he was held as Battalion O/C although it was realised by all that he was too old for the job. At this period an election was held to appoint officers of the Volunteers. These elections were more to select men who would be in a suitable position (because of local standing or occupations) to hold certain offices rather than to select those suitable as fighting material.

There was one Brigade in Kerry at this time (1919) and Austin Stack was said to be Brigade O/C. (He was

also Minister for Home Affairs, an appointment which kept him out of Kerry, mostly in Dublin, on the run, or in jail. Paddy Cahill was second in command of the Brigade.

The Battalion Council of our Battalion, comprised of the Battalion Staff and an officer from each company, met regularly in Castleisland. At these meetings reports on organisation and training were made and matters from headquarters discussed and attended to.

Throughout the year 1919 no serious incidents happened in Kerry. Thomas McEllistrim and Jack Cronin had been reprimanded by G.H.Q. for the shooting in Tralee in 1918. They were still on the run and were keeping quiet. In Tipperary Breen and Treacy were said to have been also reprimanded for Solohead and Knocklong. The Irish Government policy at the time appeared to be "go slow" with the Volunteers; don't rush open conflict".

In the autumn of 1919 the Dáil Loan was being pushed, house to house canvass made and the success was not going well with the British authorities. The loan was proclaimed and any literature concerning the loan seized. I was posting up some notices in connection with the loan at Scartaglin one Sunday morning about Mass time. The local R.I.C. sergeant saw me and came to tear them down. I prevented him and he had to go away. I was alone at the time but during the altercation three or four elderly men who were going into the church stepped up on either side of me. I did not see them but the sergeant did and, no doubt, considered it wiser to walk away. This incident had a sequel some few days later when my house was searched by a Tralee sergeant and three R.I.C. for literature. There was a warrant for the search, and though they went

through everything minutely nothing incriminating was found.

To keep the Volunteers active our company turned their attention to running sports, feiseanna, concerts and plays. The Gaelic League was used a great deal by us as a cover for running these events. There was also a house to house collection for the arms' fund.

Late in 1919 there arrived in the company area a man who was well introduced to the Company Officers as Peadar Clancy. He was handed over to us by the Rathmore Battalion. Peadar Clancy's name was known throughout Ireland as a national figure, and coming to us as he did we had no reason to doubt his genuineness. He stated he was on the run and just wanted a rest. Scartaglin was quiet and we found him a suitable place at Neddie Connor's at Dromulton. The house was secluded and the old people were ardent and active Sinn Féiners. Their two sons, Pa and David, were active Volunteers and the two daughters were active in Cumann na mBan. It was a house that was always open to members and officers of the Volunteers and men on the run. Peadar, as we accepted him, went locally by the name of Seán O'Farrell, a relative of the O'Connor family. He confined his movements and during the winter did not give much cause for anxiety. He went away occasionally for short periods and returned with stories of activities in other companies. He expressed the wish to meet the leaders of the local companies, and on a couple of occasions he addressed about twenty men from the Companies of Scartaglin, Currow and Cordail.

He told us fairly tall stories of his activities and it was at one of these meetings he said something which made me suspicious. When I mentioned it to the other

Volunteers they regarded me as one who was out to do the Volunteers an injury. Still I decided to see the Battalion O/C (Dan O'Mahony) and ask his advice. The Battalion O/C had heard of Peadar Clancy but had never met him. He would not consider it advisable to go and meet this man unless the man asked for him. I told Dan O'Mahony of a plan O'Farrell had put forward to disarm some R.I.C. men who escorted the postman from Farranfore who carried the old age pensions each Friday to Scartaglin. Dan O'Mahony would not agree to allow the plan to be carried out. Dan O'Mahony said he would make enquiries and in the meantime this man was to be kept under observation.

Peadar (or Seán) had become a great favourite with the more active Volunteers in the company and especially with the Connor family. When I told them I had been with the Battalion O/C and told them of his instructions, I became public enemy No. 1. Weeks passed and I heard nothing from the Battalion O/C, though I made it my business to call on him weekly for information.

In January 1920 there was a race meeting in Scartaglin run by the company (ostensibly by the Gaelic League). As usual the pubs were thronged after the races and "Seán" was mixing round with the crowd and apparently enjoying himself when a member of the R.I.C. came into the bar for a drink. Without any warning Seán drew a .32 revolver (given him by one of the local Volunteers for his protection while in the company area) and levelled it at the R.I.C. man's poll. The Volunteers in his company snapped the gun and without attracting attention moved Seán out. He posed as being drunk when I met him and I ordered him out of the village.

After this incident there was a closer watch kept on his movements by the Volunteers and he left for Limerick side, only to re-appear again about March. In the meantime nothing had been heard from the Battalion O/C concerning the man except to keep him under observation. Volunteers were instructed, therefore, not to leave him out of their sight if he appeared again. I was surprised, therefore, in or about the first week of March 1920 when going through the village of Scartaglin to see Seán and his escort (Mick O'Leary of Breahig) sitting down on the grass margin in front of the R.I.C. barracks. I saluted them and passed on to the outskirts of the village. They followed and overtook me. I inquired what they were doing and Seán told me he was making a plan of the barracks in preparation for an attack. He said he had been appointed Volunteer organiser for Kerry and was going to make a start by attacking Scartaglin barracks. I said I thought it strange that he should have to sit in front of the barracks to make a map of it, that I was looking at it every day and could give him any information required. He said he was disappointed by my attitude, that we were both I.R.B. men and that there should be confidence between us. At this time (March) barracks were being attacked in other counties and we were actually considering an attack on Scartaglin barracks. I told "Seán" that he should show some sign of his appointment by going through the proper channels. I, of course, denied any knowledge of the I.R.B. and suspected that since his return some of our officers had told him of our intention about attacking the barracks.

I did not see "Seán" again for more than a week. About the middle of March I got short notice to meet some

Ballymacelligott Volunteers near the village of Scartaglin. They were coming to attack the barracks. The message arrived through Pa Ned Connor of Dromultin and I arranged with him where to meet them. I myself was to keep the barracks under observation up to 11 p.m., when I would report to them. The night was pitch dark and so wet that nobody was out. I lay on the grass a few feet from the barrack door and during my stay there only one man came out. It was so dark I could not see him though I could almost touch him. I concluded he was one of the R.I.C. At the appointed time I met the Volunteers from Ballymacelligott and put them into the hall across the way from the barracks. The hall was only about 30 yards from the barracks, but such was the night that no matter what noise they made, and they made plenty, they could not be heard outside the door. It was an ideal night for a surprise attack. There were about fifty men in the hall, mostly Ballymacelligott Volunteers and a few from Cordal and Scartaglin Companies.

Thomas McEllistrim said they were going to attack the barracks and, to my surprise, he told me Seán O'Farrell was in charge. It was then I recognised my man and only then realised that the Ballymacelligott Volunteers had fallen for him too. I inquired of him how he was going to capture the barracks. He told me that all he required was to force in the wooden shutters and throw in a bomb and call on the R.I.C. to surrender. Thomas McEllistrim, Jack Cronin and some others were listening to the discussion. I knew the structure intimately and had observed during recent months that steel shutters had been put up on all windows. These could be taken down during the daytime so that an observer would not see them during the day. In addition I knew that the windows had steel wire netting

of about one inch mesh. I told those present what I knew about the windows but "Seán" still insisted that there were only wooden shutters. To settle the matter it was decided that we would examine the windows, and four or five of us, including Thomas McEllistrim and "Seán", went in round the building. It was so wet and stormy we had plenty of opportunity to examine the windows at close range without fear of drawing anybody's attention.

When we returned to the others in the hall all agreed that I was right about the wire and they accepted my statement about the steel shutters. It was then decided to postpone the attack to a later date. "Seán", however, was still looking for action and started off with some others on a man hunt. They searched the pubs for the policeman who was supposed to have left the barracks but did not succeed in finding him. Most of the Volunteers went to their homes but "Seán" and some others stayed at Connor's of Dromultin, where they held up a postman the next day. "Seán" then went on to Ballymacelligott where he stayed for the next week, when an order from G.H.Q. Dublin arrived. The order was to arrest "Seán" and put him under armed guard. He was tried by courtmartial (by officers from G.H.Q.) at Tournafulla, Co. Limerick, during the next week or so and found guilty of spying. He was sentenced to death. He was executed on the 30th March, 1920. He admitted being in the pay of England but said he had done nobody any harm. His name was Crowley from Dunmanway, Co. Cork, an ex-soldier of the British Army.

During the same period there was another genius travelling around Kerry and in Scartaglin Company area a great deal. He went by the name of Gearóid O'Sullivan,

another well-known name in the movement. This man was at last picked up and was a prisoner of mine for some weeks. He was a native of South Kerry and reared in the County Home. He was a shoemaker by trade. He had read a lot and had a most extraordinary memory. He could rattle off speeches made by Members of Parliament on important occasions as well as the "Speeches from the Dock" series. He could read the paper and quote it word for word later. The Brigade courtmartialled him as a spy and acquitted him on the charge but found him guilty of impersonation. He admitted the latter charge and, in an Oxford accent, said "he did it in order that he might get a better bite or sup than the ordinary man". He was sentenced to spend two years with a shoemaker at Anabla and not to leave the district.

About the middle of March 1920 Gortatlea barracks was attacked and captured. I received word to go with a few men from my company. I was unable to go but three or four from my company went.

The night of March the 31st (Thursday) was fixed for the attack on Scartaglin R.I.C. barracks. Thomas McEllistrim was to take charge and all arrangements were left to him except that I was to have the place scouted by local Volunteers and place outposts on all roads leading to Scartaglin. The Battalion O/C was not informed of the attack; neither was the Castleisland Company. Other companies in the battalion took part. The plan of attack was to blow in the gable and windows with explosives and set fire to the building with bottles of paraffin and other inflammable material. The breach made by the explosion was not sufficient and a fire which had started was put out

accidentally by water flowing from a storage tank which had been hit by bullets. The attack failed but had the effect of the place being evacuated in a few days. The six occupants of the barracks were transferred to Castleisland and Tralee. One of our men, Ned McCarthy of Brehig, was wounded in the shoulder during the attack.

The R.I.C. moved out on Saturday, and although there was a general order to burn all vacated barracks we decided instead to dismantle the barracks. The job was done on Easter Sunday 1920. The barracks was of the hut type, built in sections of pitch-pine. About sixty men of the Scartaglin Company were put to work and in a couple of nights it had been completely removed to a safe place. It was subsequently auctioned to people in the area, realising about £180 which was sent to Dublin for arms. We could have got revolvers but did not consider them suitable and decided to wait for rifles, which we never received though some few did come to the brigade.

About this time the East Kerry (Kerry No. 2) Brigade was formed. Dan O'Mahony was in charge. Humphrey Murphy was appointed Quartermaster to the brigade. He was young and most active. There was a noticeable push in the battalion organisation from the time of his appointment. There were now only three police barracks in our battalion area - Castleisland, Brosna and Farranfore. These were strong buildings which had been recently strengthened and their defences improved.

Brosna barracks was in the village - an isolated two storey building with a narrow laneway separating it from a two storey house on one side and on the other side was the graveyard and Catholic Church. The battalion

arranged to attack it in early May, but information must have leaked out as a party of British military from Limerick appeared in the village just as we were going to the assembly point adjacent to the village. Some Volunteers ran into them and there was an exchange of shots. Other Volunteers coming from the Duagh direction ran into a party of British military at Feale Bridge and six of them were captured. The captured men were subsequently tried by courtmartial and sentenced to heavy terms of imprisonment. The attack was called off and another attack fixed for early June.

The next attack was better organised and kept more secret. Our men got into position without a hitch. About forty Volunteers from the battalion, along with an active party specially selected, were in the attack. In order to avoid another surprise the roads were blocked for miles round the village. The main attack was to be made from the two-storey building adjacent to the barracks and separated from it by a ten foot lane. It was hoped to smash in the roof of the barracks from the top of the adjacent building, while the other parties in position round the building were to draw the fire of the garrison while this part of the operation was being carried out. The barracks was well loop-holed and the defenders commanded the adjacent buildings so well that the attack did not work out as planned. Though weights with ropes out of them were used to batter the roof and bombs used, the fire which was started did not take effect and the attack, which lasted well into the morning, was called off.

During the attack I was with a section in a house about 30 yards across the Square from the barracks.

It was directly in front of the barracks. We got in through the back yard in the dark and had no idea of the lay-out in relation to the barracks in daylight. I questioned the scout who had guided us into position as to whether there was any other way of retreat from the building, and he informed me that there was a window which could be used to enter another adjacent yard. The occupants of the house we had entered we put to safety in a back kitchen, and we took up position at the upstairs windows awaiting the attack to open from the command post which had been established near the barracks. The room we were occupying I found beautifully decorated. The furniture was new and expensive. The windows were large and on a level with the floors, so that if we wanted to move about we had no cover. We decided to use the ticks and mattresses from the beds and took up our position behind these. We soon realised they were no protection. One of the fellows got hit and there was a trail of feathers around the room after the first volley.

The fire from the barracks was intense and in a short while the furniture and the entire room was riddled. The walls were all bullet marks. Only by keeping close to the floor could we move. When the cease fire came it was late in the morning. We then realised that we were in a building that had but one retreat and that along a passage-way of about five or six yards in length which was in direct line with the barracks and under heavy fire. Our scout was missing. We had difficulty in getting out the wounded men but managed it without anyone else getting hit. The casualties on our side was one wounded.

This attack had a sequel later in the day when about twenty of the battalion were returning through

Cordail Company area. We decided to lay an ambush at Glenlarn Cross hoping that British reinforcements from Castleisland or Tralee might pass that way. We took up position at and around the Cross in the forenoon. We took turn in keeping observation while the others slept or rested after the night. We could see portion of the road for some miles distance round a bend, and at about 2 p.m. one of our observers reported that he saw a motor car coming. We were on the alert immediately, but as time passed and nothing came into our immediate view two Volunteers offered to go out to the road, about 200 yards away, to investigate. The two disappeared round a bend in the road and ran into a British military scouting car. There was an exchange of shots and two of the occupants of the car in civilian clothes got out. There was a running skirmish among the furze bushes which covered the hillside, and as we were about to close in from both sides the main body of British military were seen coming in the distance. They heard the shooting and spread out across country. There were several lorries of them, upwards of 200 men. We had difficulty in getting away but we did succeed in pulling back across country. One of our men, Humphrey Murphy, Brigade Q/M, was wounded. It was said at the time that this was the first engagement with British military since 1916.

Early in 1920 the Volunteers in East Kerry were getting impatient with the Battalion and Brigade Staffs. The responsible officers of these staffs were getting out of step with the fighting material in the Volunteer force. During 1918 and 1919 Volunteers were courtmartialled for shooting at policemen and in June 1920 there was an order not to attack military. I am not sure where the order

originated. In the meantime, of course, the Volunteers despite these orders were attacking police and Tans, and it was difficult to distinguish one from the other at times. It would be difficult to expect that an order against shooting military would be obeyed in the letter as in our case when returning from the Brosna attack. The responsible officers in Kerry, however, were in favour of carrying out G.H.Q. orders. The result was that both the Gortatlea and Scartaglin barracks were attacked without the knowledge of the Brigade or Battalion Staffs, or at least without their active support.

At this period there were a few Volunteers on the run from the Ballymacelligott Company area and they were most active but got no co-operation from the battalion or brigade. As an example of these unit activities: in the autumn of 1920 about eighty men from the Ballymacelligott Company with about a dozen Volunteers from Scartaglin and Cordail spent a whole week in one position at Ballycarthy Crossroads (junction on the main Tralee-Castleisland-Killarney road) hoping to get a party of British military that were known to pass there regularly. The party lay in ambush within three miles of Tralee military post, but not a man in British uniform passed during the week. However, in the short time Humphrey Murphy was Brigade Quartermaster the battalions were becoming more active in the Kerry ll area.

Rathmore Battalion had only one R.I.C. barracks in the area. It was important as it cut across the Volunteers' lines of communications. It was an isolated building in the village of Rathmore. It was a two storey building and had been brought up to date as a fortified post.

It contained about 20 men (R.I.C. and Tans). On 20th June, 1920, about twelve Volunteers from Scartaglin and Cordal were asked to take part in an attack on the barracks. The request came from the Rathmore Battalion Officers. The attack was to be carried out in broad daylight. There was a mission on in Rathmore and every evening about half the garrison went to the mission about three quarters of a mile from the barracks. The remainder of the garrison were observed to spend the period during the mission playing pitch and toss in the public road in front of the barracks. The plan of attack was to rush the barracks front and rear and catch the garrison off their guard. It had considerable risk but it was worth a chance, and Con O'Leary, N.T., (later Brigade Q/M) was the local driving force behind the idea. The mission commenced about 7.30 p.m. and at that time we assembled in a field a few hundred yards south of the village.

There were about forty or fifty Volunteers, mostly from the local company. Con O'Leary explained the layout to us and I was to take about twenty men to rush the members of the garrison on the road in front of the barracks, while he would rush the rest with a similar number and try and gain a surprise entrance to the barracks before I charged the men on the road. Both attacking parties were to get as near as possible to the barracks before making the final rush. I was to make my final jump off from a position near the Courthouse, opposite the Railway Hotel, on hearing a blast of a whistle from the other section. We got to the Courthouse without any difficulty, and from there to the barrack gate was about 70 yards. We had no view of the barrack gate from where we were but our scouts reported that the garrison were

playing on the road. Suddenly, while waiting for the whistle blast, the garrison disappeared off the road as though our presence became known to them, and they did not come out again for the remainder of the evening. The plan did not work and the attack was called off.

In July another attempt was made at capturing Rathmore barracks. Sometime previously, together with the members of the Ballymacelligott Company we had brought from Ross Castle, Killarney, some old cannons that were fixed there as ornaments. They were each about half a ton in weight. We carried out some experiments with them and it was found that they would discharge a projectile of a few pounds fairly accurately at close range. It was decided to use one of the cannons in the Rathmore attack. The railway line was just by the barracks and a railway truck was fitted up with sandbags, from which the cannon would be used on the windows of the barracks. There were also, simultaneously, explosives to be dropped inside the bulge or V of the steel shutters on the barrack windows. They were to be put in by using something like a builder's hod specially made for the purpose, as the windows were too high to reach by hand. When everything was in readiness and all men in position, the plan miscarried due to mistaken signals. Before the truck with the cannon could get into position one of the hod carriers dropped his bomb into one of the windows. The bomb contained about four lbs. of gelignite and there was a heavy explosion. It was said that a number of the garrison who were in the room were disabled. The window and steel shutters were blown completely away. The cannon was not able to get into position, so after some hours of rifle fire the attack was called off.

Efforts were made in the summer of 1920 to get an organiser or training officer for the brigade, but although it was said later that Ernie O'Malley was about to come to Kerry no one came until the following January. Though the Volunteers were active during this period there was little organisation behind their activities. They lacked leaders with military experience or leaders with confidence in handling a large number of men. Each company had upwards of a dozen reliable fighting men who were always ready at short notice to take on any engagement for which they were required. In addition there were another dozen at least in each company that had also got some experience under fire and were equally dependable.

Though engagements with the enemy were few during the months of August, September and October 1920, there were plenty of company activities to keep the men active. In Scartaglin Company at this time there were the usual weekly parades, a course of special training in combat, general duties, scouting. The East Kerry Sinn Féin Court was held in our area regularly each month, as well as the parish and, occasionally, a district court. The area was ideally suited for these courts, for as well as being fairly central to the area concerned it had security against surprise raids by the enemy forces. All roads leading to Scartaglin were kept under observation in daytime.

During the summer and autumn of 1920 there were also occasions when a number of prisoners were kept in the area. Any important prisoners from any other part of the brigade were bound to be sent to our area pending trial.

In October 1920 the strength of Scartaglin Company

had increased to about 120, and as raids were occurring regularly in other centres we decided to put on a night guard for the entire company area. The four main roads leading into the company area from the chief British garrison centres and from which we could expect a raid if it came at night, were manned by four separate guards. At the company boundary each road wound its way up fairly steep hills. The tops of the hills practically coincided with the company boundary in all cases and it was an ideal observation post, giving a view of the road on the other side of the hill for a long distance. The guards on these posts were posted nightly by the Section Commander of the section from which they were drawn. The guard usually consisted of a leader and three men, of whom one was armed with a shotgun to hold up and challenge any strangers of the tramp kind or anyone acting suspiciously. There was also provision to light fires at given points should they observe any enemy movements that looked like a raid. Inside these guards there were occasionally other guards as circumstances warranted, such as prison guards. Hence the importance of a signal.

There was also another warning signal introduced about this time; - the blowing of horns if the enemy came in sight. This was a most effective signal in our area up to the truce. I think it came down to us from the land agitation days when it was used effectively to warn people that the bailiffs were coming. The word horn means, of course, a cow's horn, but a bottle with the end out of it or a tin megaphone was the type we used, generally the latter. In calm conditions the sound of the horn could be heard two to three miles away. All Volunteers were trained in the use of the horn as well as elderly

people residing in key observation points. Training was done indoors so that the sound would not be mistaken for a raid or round-up. When the horn was sounded at one end of the company area it was generally taken up by other Volunteers who heard it and in a few minutes the whole company was alerted.

Our next activity refers to the 1st November, 1920, which is, of course, a holiday and it was also a big fair day in Castleisland. The fair is held in the main street. The street is generally thronged with cattle, sheep and horses. On the night before the fair (Sunday) we received instructions from the battalion to take up positions in the town of Castleisland to ambush the military and Tan patrol that was expected to be out on the street that (Sunday) night. Other companies were to cover the other roads and streets. About fifteen members of the Scartaglin Company took up positions on the Scartaglin road on the verge of the town. No one from the battalion came near us, and as there was no evidence of any military action we called it off after a couple of hours.

The following day the Ballymacelligott Company made a gallant attempt at taking an armed military patrol in the main street. The patrol went through the main street daily from the barracks to the post office, a distance of about 250 yards. They collected the mail and returned to the barracks. The patrol consisted of about twelve men under an N.C.O., all armed with rifles. Ballymacelligott Company decided to capture the rifles on the fair day. The plan was to have the Volunteers scattered along the route to the post office and as the patrol came through the fair they would quietly walk in beside the soldiers, each

Volunteer to man a soldier. The Volunteers were armed with revolvers, and as the patrol made its way through the cattle and horses the Volunteers slipped in beside them. When they got to the post office Thomas McEllistrim, who was in charge, realised for the first time that the patrol was twice the normal strength and that he had not got sufficient men to disarm the lot without endangering the people at the fair, so he gave the signal to fall back. He was just in time as the soldiers seemed to suspect something and got excited. One of them discharged a shot.

The Battalion O/C did not know of the Ballymacelligott Company's intention to hold up the patrol and that evening it was arranged between the officers of the Ballymacelligott, Scartaglin and Cordal Companies to ambush the patrol in the main street of Castleisland on the following morning (All Souls' Day). The positions were to be occupied during the night and the barracks was to be brought under fire when the ambush commenced so that no reinforcements could come out to their aid. The patrol was due at the post office before 10 a.m. and everything was ready. All were in position when at about 9 o'clock Fr. Brennan, C.C., Castleisland, came to where Thomas McEllistrim and Jack Cronin had their command post at Knight's Hotel (the post office was just across the street) and asked to have the job called off, that the Battalion O/C did not authorise it. They refused to listen to him about calling off the job and tried to reason with him. Some were in favour of arresting Fr. Brennan. He threatened that if he did not get a promise to call off the job that he would go to the barracks and tell the military not to come out.

Time was drawing near and the situation was getting

critical. It was a situation in which anything could happen. It was not of much concern to Fr. Brennan if the ambush took place. He had no responsibility for it, but apparently he had lost his nerve and had interfered where he shouldn't. It was a trying situation for Thomas McEllistrim, but despite the urging of the Volunteers to make Fr. Brennan prisoner he decided to call off the ambush.

To explain why Fr. Brennan had been informed of the ambush! Both he and his brother, Rev. Fr. Charles Brennan, also a curate at that time in the Kerry Diocese, were both very active in the Sinn Féin movement and regarded highly by the Volunteers. Fr. Pat Brennan had been in the Castleisland parish for some years. He was active in the Gaelic League, Chairman of East Kerry Sinn Féin Court since it was formed and held a high position in the Sinn Féin organisation. On every occasion he showed approval of the Volunteers and their activities. His sermons were noted for their Sinn Féin and Volunteer sentiments. Occasionally it was embarrassing for Volunteers to listen to him attack the English forces from the altar. He let himself go completely on the 1st November at the 12 o'clock Mass in Castleisland. His sermon was on the shooting incident at the post office on that morning (he was not aware of the attempt to disarm the patrol). He said that shooting was too good for the Tans and military who would do such things. The Ballymacelligott Volunteers were at his Mass and took him seriously, and in case of reprisals after the ambush they thought it better to inform him so that he would be prepared. When first told of the coming ambush he showed instant approval, but he went to the Brigade O/C

and then changed his mind about it.

The Volunteers, on reflection, thought badly of the whole thing. They had not so much blame on Dan O'Mahony, Brigade O/C, who was old and not able to apply himself to this type of hit-and-run warfare. The Volunteers' reaction was to keep after the Castleisland garrison, a few to hang around the town quietly until some Tans or military appeared in the street and blaze into them. This happened a day or two later when Mike O'Leary of Brehig followed a Tan at the double, firing his revolver as he chased the Tan through the town almost to the barrack door. The Tan was hit but managed to reach safety. Then the fireworks started. The military came out and shot up the town.

The whole month of November 1920 was a heavy one by the British in Kerry. Raids, rounds-up and shootings, hardly a day passed that some incident didn't occur. A reign of terror was being carried out with a vengeance. Ballymacelligott Company bore the brunt of the attack. They had been in position for days near Ballydwyer creamery with land mines hoping to get a party of military lorries, when one morning, before they were in position, a party of Tans dashed up to the creamery and opened fire on a number of people who were supplying milk. They killed two and wounded several. Those Volunteers who were coming to their positions on hearing the shooting, dashed to the creamery and emptied their rifles and revolvers at the Tans as they scurried for the safety of their lorries. The "Daily Mail" afterwards published pictures regarding the "Ballydwyer Ambush". They showed photos of a town and what was supposed to have been the location of the ambush. Nearly

every company got a visit from the enemy this month.

About twenty lorries took part in a round-up of Scartaglin village and the immediate vicinity. A few of those who were being looked for were inside the ring thrown round the village, but a party of British military were late getting into position and we all managed to get out safely. A few fellows who were working with horses were carried to Killarney for identification and let go that night. In this raid the British left a party of military in a house as they withdrew. An officer and ten men held Jerh. Leary's house and made the family prisoners and took up positions inside the windows. Jerh. Leary, who was an officer of Scartaglin Company, had got out of the ring that day and I suppose the hope was that he would, with some others, return when the main body of the military had gone. However, the ruse did not work. A neighbour called to the house and when he found the door shut against him he sent round to adjacent houses. The main body of military returned that night and took away their house party and some civilian prisoners.

We had luck with us that day in another way also. For some months a party of us had a dug-out in a glen south of the village of Scartaglin and about 150 yards from my house. We slept in it every night and had our complete company headquarters there. The dug-out also contained five rifles, about twenty shotguns and ammunition and a supply of home-made grenades. When the round-up was on I worked my way to the dug-out, concerned for the security of the guns. I was surprised to find military and Tans in the vicinity before me. They went through the fields at the double, searching fences and any place that looked suspicious as they went along. From a distance of about

100 yards I watched them search along the glen until they came to about 20 yards of the dug-out, when they were attracted in another direction and went off on a new mission as if they were obeying my wish. I pocketed the revolver I had held in my hand, undecided what to do if the dug-out were discovered. It was only then I realised that this was not an ordinary raid but a round-up of some size. I was at the point where two parties of the British should have joined up, but one of the parties did not reach its position in time.

In December 1920 a meeting was held at Currens of officers from Currow, Scartaglin, Castleisland, Cordal and Ballymacelligott Companies. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways and means of organising an active service unit. This had been decided several times previously and it was the general opinion of those present that the unit should be organised and a training officer got who would get the organisation on a more active footing. There was little use in Volunteers going on active service as a unit unless they had an organisation behind them. The brigade, battalions and companies should be active and more effort made to get information of the enemy and to have plans worked out to meet him with sufficient force. This meeting bore fruit, as in January 1921 Andy Cooney arrived from Dublin as organiser and training officer for Kerry No. 2 Brigade. During the month of December little work had been done by the Volunteers. The weather was bad and we were living like rats - nibbling a bit here and there when we could get it. We were badly clad and suffering from itch and lice. The people were wonderful. There was always an open door for those genuinely on the run, but we were shy facing into strange

houses and had not yet reached the stage when we would ask for something to eat. That came later.

The British, however, continued their November drive and there were raids and shootings daily. A Sinn Féin Court was raided by the Tans and military at Currow and a member of the court, Jack Connors, was tied to a lorry and dragged along the road until he was dead. At Ballymacelligott two Volunteers, Reidy and Lean, were surprised in a house in Ballydwyer and shot by the fireside as Lean was drawing his revolver. In Cordal a party of military and Tans in civilian attire held up people going to early Mass after they, the Tans, spent the night in a hay barn.

The arrival of the Brigade Training Officer put new heart into the Volunteers and especially those who were on the run. It took time for a stranger to learn who was who. The organisation underwent a set-back in Kerry No. 2 Brigade area in the past two months. The Brigade and Battalion Staffs had fallen down on their jobs. The men who were active as officers in 1916 had grown tired, some were worried and had other responsibilities. Younger and more active men should replace them. These were the problems facing the training officer, and it was not until the month of February that he got things moving.

In the end of January 1921 the North Cork Column under Seán Moylan carried out a successful ambush at Tureengarrive Glens, on the border of Scartaglin Company area. The North Cork men were acting on information from Cork City intelligence that there was a senior British officer on an inspection tour of Kerry and was due to return to Cork. I think the Cork Volunteers had other

roads leading from Kerry into Cork also manned on this occasion. The British party travelled in two touring cars. There were seven in the party, including Major Holmes who was killed. At the time it was stated that Kerry Volunteers had been asked to relieve the North Cork men who had been lying in position for two days in bad weather.

The usual military activities followed the ambush. Scartaglin got a little attention: the Sinn Féin hall was burned and raids and pillaging followed, but the brunt of their revenge was reserved for North Cork.

Towards the end of February 1921 there was a new Brigade Staff appointed: Humphrey Murphy was O/C, John J. Rice, Vice O/C; T. Daly, Adjutant; and Con O'Leary Q/M. The Battalion Staffs were in nearly all cases also reorganised.

In or about the last week in February 1921 information was received from Cork that another senior officer was visiting Kerry on inspection. The brigade decided to lay an ambush at the "Bower", about half way between Rathmore and Barraduff. There were about 100 Volunteers mobilised at the "Bower", where they held positions for two days. The Volunteers were drawn from the adjacent battalions - Castleisland, Rathmore, Killarney, Kenmare, and Moylan had some from North Cork. As the position was a fairly public one it was decided not to remain in it too long, so during the night the Volunteers withdrew to Clonbannin on the Rathmore-Mallow road, where they took up positions in the early hours of the morning. Mines were laid on the road and the North Cork Volunteers took up positions on the north side of the road. They had

a machine gun. About forty Kerry Volunteers, under Thomas McEllistrim, occupied positions to the south of the road.

About midday the enemy was sighted and three lorries, an armoured car and a private car came into our position at top speed. The mines failed to go off, but our first volley having got most of the drivers all the vehicles were stopped. Some ran into the ditch in the centre of our position. The armoured car, however, was able to operate. The fight lasted for over an hour and it was considered advisable not to remain too long in case of reinforcements arriving for the British. It was decided to withdraw from the positions. The British suffered some casualties, including the senior officer, General Cummins. We suffered no loss.

The week following we were mobilised at Dunloe Gap near Beaufort to form a Brigade Column. The column consisted of about ten men, each drawn from Castleisland, Killarney, Rathmore, Kenmare and Firies, which included Ballymacelligott Company. Dan Allman was O/C of the column. Thomas McEllistrim was Vice O/C. The Section Commanders were Johnny Connor, Jack Cronin, Jim Coffey and myself. I was also Acting Adjutant, Tom Connor (Scarteen) Quartermaster, and Jack Shanahan First Aid.

After a week or ten days in the Gap training and equipping, we moved through Killarney Battalion area, but as nothing was offering in that battalion we moved on to Castleisland Battalion. We billeted in Currow Company area on March the 15th and 16th, and on the night of the 17th as the result of information, we took up ambush positions at Dysart, near Castleisland, expecting a party of Tans to pass

towards Farranfore. Nothing came and we went on to Scartaglin area, where we remained until the 19th March. We then moved during the night to Headford, Rathmore.

During this period our intelligence system was bad. We had little or no inside information of enemy activities and anything we were doing was pure chance. Also the enemy varied his plans daily and rarely travelled the same route twice in succession. During our stay in the Castleisland battalion area on the 16th March, 1921, I interviewed a Tan from Castleisland barracks who was friendly with a shopkeeper in Castleisland, hoping to get from him some information regarding the activities of the garrison at that time or in the near future. I could get nothing from him that the brigade could go on.

On the night of the 20th March, 1921, we moved out of Kilquane, Headford, for the foot of the Paps. On the following day the Battalion Adjutant of the local battalion arrived to let us know that a party of British military had gone to Kenmare by train, and the party they would relieve in Kenmare would return by the 3.15 p.m. train at Headford that day. Headford station was about five miles from us and we set off without delay to reach there in time.

In the meantime the local Volunteers were to be alerted and a section with shotguns sent on to Headford to join us. Another local section was to remove rails, so as to prevent the Cork-Killarney train connecting up with Headford at 3.15 when it was due.

On arrival at Headford the column was halted on a by-road adjacent to the station while the officers had a look over the ground. There was no unnecessary delay

and Johnny O'Connor's section (No. 1) was called and given positions on the north of the line, on the embankment - which was about twelve feet high. I was then called and given a position on the embankment on the south of the line. Then Jim Coffey's section was called in. At this juncture, while my men were pushing wagons out of the line of fire and when I had not yet examined the position on the embankment the Kenmare train was seen steaming in about 150 yards away. We rushed for our rifles, which we had laid down against the embankment while clearing the station, and clambered on to the embankment as the train steamed in. On getting on top of the embankment I found we had no cover to shield us from the view of the occupants of the train as the field in front of us was quite level with the top of the embankment. We rushed across the small field to the nearest fence about 30 yards distant, and from there were able to see the military sitting in the carriages. While we waited for the fire to open we were not in a position to say how many of our sections were in position or if any of them had succeeded in getting into their right positions. As it turned out, some of my men had gone in with Jim Coffey's section, which was mainly in the station house, while himself and Dan Allman, the Column O/C, and some others were caught on the platform (Kenmare side) and went into the W.C. The fourth section were outside and could not get into position before the firing opened. The military having to change trains were moving across the platform unaware of anything unusual afoot, and one of them went to the W.C. In the act of disarming him a shot was fired by Allman. This was the signal for fire to open generally and for about 20 minutes the firing went on. Most of the enemy got shot down in the first volley

and the others rolled for cover under the train where an N.C.O. held out. Allman and Coffey went to the end of the platform to enfilade the N.C.O. under the train and Allman was shot through the head. Jim Coffey crossed the line to me to let me know the position. We contacted Thomas McEllistrim who was in the station house, and he decided to withdraw as the Cork train was due in and we had no information that the line was not free. With Thomas McEllistrim and Coffey my section crossed the line to the north side on the west of the station and contacted Johnny Connor's section, where we learned that Jim Bailey had been shot through the head when in the act of throwing a grenade. The most of us retreated towards the west for a distance of about half a mile at the north side of the line (some retreated towards the south), and when we were about 200 yards from the station the Cork train steamed in. We were quite visible from the station and the Cork train. Machine gun fire was opened on us from a British military party in the Cork train. The fire continued for a considerable time until we were able to get round a bend in the line and cross to the south and the Glenflesk mountains. The enemy casualties were 28, including their officer, ours two - Dan Allman and Jim Bailey. The train from Kenmare was in a quarter of an hour before schedule and resulted in surprising us when we were posting sections.

The column retreated through the Glenflesk mountains during the night and arrived at Mangerton, Kilgarvan, where we remained quiet for some days. The following week it was planned to lay for the same relief train again, this time at Loo Bridge, but this time the British had a party of military round the station. We afterwards

surmised that some local British agent had seen our officers carrying out an examination of the position and had passed on the word.

There was nothing offering in Kenmare so the column went on to the Black Valley and Beaufort where it was hoped to get something on the main Killarney-Killorglin road. After days there we went on to Ballyhar and then to Currow and Cordal. Acting on information, we took up positions for some days on the Castleisland-Brosna road at Blackbanks where military lorries were expected to pass to Brosna. This also drew blank and we went into Castleisland in the hope of getting a night patrol that did the town most nights. This was also a failure and we spent some days around Cordal and Scartaglin hoping something would show up.

About the end of April 1921 information was received that a military party would travel from Castleisland to Tralee by train and return the same day. It was decided to ambush the train about two miles west of Castleisland. We were billeted in Kilcow close to the position the night before and had only to step into position at short notice. A party of three or four went ahead of us and removed some rails at a bend in the line. At the appointed time we were in position and the train approached, but instead of stopping, as expected, within the ambush position, the train went right through. The engine and one of the carriages ran on the sleepers and remounted the line, dragging remainder of the train on for a distance of four or five hundred yards where it came to a stop. It was too far outside our positions to do anything and we quietly withdrew in the direction of the main Castleisland road.

The company and battalion organisation had reached

a high state of efficiency in the past two months. The strength of the companies had increased. Training was carried out regularly. Battalion officers visited the companies on inspection and organisation. Discipline in the force was good; it was strict without being severe. There was a spirit of co-operation and helpfulness all round. Only for severe cases of indiscipline was it necessary to punish Volunteers. Such offences as disobeying orders were considered most severely. Then the punishment was generally a day or so many days, according to the nature of the offence, doing guard duty for 12 hours or working for some farmer, generally for one of the Volunteer officers who, because of his service in the Volunteers, was behind in his farm work. These sentences were given and taken in a good spirit and no bitterness resulted.

The companies did general duties for or, in some cases, with the column when the column was billeted in the company area. Some companies had more work of this kind than others. In Scartaglin Company area the brigade and battalion headquarters were located. This meant extra work for the company. There were extra guard duties. Dispatches had to be carried, which necessitated a special section of dispatch riders who held themselves in readiness day or night. Transport was organised on the line of sections. Each section had a transport leader whose job it was to provide horse spring carts or other transport at short notice. There were engineers responsible for blocking roads when necessary, and intelligence and first-aid personnel. The running of such a company, apart from combat activities, was a night and day job for the company officers.

In May 1921 the Brigade Column was disbanded and Battalion Columns took its place. The members of the Brigade Column all went to their own Battalion Columns. In or about the same period there was a new Battalion Staff appointed by the brigade in the Castleisland area. John O'Leary, Scartaglin, was appointed Battalion O/C; Dave McCarthy, Brehig, Vice O/C; Jack Walsh, Currow, Q/M; Richard Shanahan, Castleisland, Adjutant. In addition there were officers appointed in charge of special services. These included engineers, transport, signalling, scouting, intelligence, dispatch riding, communications and first-aid.

I was appointed as Battalion Officer in charge of dispatch riding and scouting. My task was to organise these services throughout the battalion in all the companies: -Castleisland, Currow, Scartaglin, Cordal, Brosna, Knocknagoshel and Lyre Companies. Dispatches, inter company, inter battalion and communications generally were considered an important part of the Volunteer organisation. To have communications pass quickly and smoothly through each company was important, and if a dispatch went astray or was delayed, to be able to check up on its course was important. Then there was a very urgent dispatch and one not so urgent or routine between companies. Each company had its own section of dispatch riders with bicycles. These were free from all other duties and were generally selected because they resided in suitable locations where dispatches could be conveniently dropped in. They should, of course, be young and active. It also meant instant delivery day or night. Each dispatch rider had a dispatch book showing the time the dispatch was received and the signature of the person who received it, with the time and date. In this way if a dispatch got lost

it was easy to trail it.

Scouting was also considered important, and all members of the different companies were lectured on its importance and how best to do it and how to make use of the information obtained.

In this period (May) all unit officers were whole-time men. Only occasionally could any of those with other interests, such as farmers, give any time away from the organisation. The result was that all branches of the organisation were going with machine-like precision.

The only service that no pressure could be put on was intelligence. This service worked well within our own organisation, but our efforts to get reliable information of the enemy's activities and intentions were not very successful. We had no agent on the inside to pass us out information until I contacted a Tan stationed in Castleisland through Maurice Greaney, a shopkeeper, to whom he had brought ammunition. I contacted this Tan in March 1921 by appointment at Greaney's house in Upper Main St., Castleisland, when we were in the vicinity of the town with the column. He had nothing reliable to give at that time. In May, as a result of information from him, the Castleisland and Firies Columns, with personnel from other companies, took up position on the Castleisland - Abbeyfeale road expecting some lorries of military and Tans to travel that way to Brosna. Due to the accidental discharge of a land mine after the men had taken up position, the men were withdrawn, as the explosion was liable to have warned the Castleisland military post and, in that case, if anything did come it would not be in our power to deal with it.

In this month (May) Rathmore unit carried out a successful ruse and successfully ambushed a party of R.I.C. and Tans near the village. The Rathmore unit were helped by men from Scartaglin, Cordal and North Cork.

At this period most roads were blocked with trees and stones or cut (trenched). Only the roads considered suitable for ambushing the enemy were left free from some obstruction. Some roads had zig-zag obstructions so as to permit horse-drawn transport for the convenience of the people. Others were cut so as to allow access through boggy fields where lorries could not travel. Each company at this time did night and day guard duties. In some of the companies special guards were posted at vital points leading to important places, such as brigade, battalion or column headquarters. The day guards were more for observation purposes as they were lightly armed and in all cases they were in possession of sounding horns to give warning. The outposts were generally posted where they were able to observe a road obstruction at which the enemy were bound to be delayed.

The spirit of the Volunteers in May and the remaining months of 1921 to the truce was magnificent. The younger Volunteers vied with each other to be listed in the combat section of the company. The strength of all companies had increased in recent months, and in some companies every able-bodied man was a Volunteer. The strength of Scartaglin Company, for instance, was about 190, and some other companies must have been equally as strong.

The Cumann na mBan were also very active in this period in the battalion area, and every company had a Cumann na mBan unit attached. They were very helpful to

the Volunteers in many ways and were able to run messages in and out of towns when Volunteers could not hope to escape attention. The Fianna were also most helpful and were able to keep enemy movements in the towns under observation without drawing attention to themselves.

The shooting of Major McKinnon on the Tralee Golf Links gave the Volunteers great heart in Kerry. McKinnon was in charge of the Auxiliaries and as well as being a daring soldier he was ruthless. He was most active and had the reputation of dropping quietly off lorries at night with a company of men and lying in ambush at key points, of sleeping in haybarns until the people of the marked houses got up in the morning, and lying in wait in the vicinity of Catholic churches so as to be conversant with the movements going to or from Mass. He was reported to have gone to Ballymacelligott on Christmas night as a result of a wager made in the bar of Benner's Hotel, Tralee, that he would shoot some prominent I.R.A. man before morning. At about 11.30 p.m. that night two of the Ballymacelligott Volunteers on the run called to the house of John Byrne, creamery manager. They had scarcely sat at the fireside when the door opened and McKinnon burst in. One of the Volunteers, Jack Lean, who was armed, drew his gun and fired. The shot hit the door over McKinnon's head. McKinnon emptied his gun into Lean and Moss Reidy in the presence of two women who tried to protect them.

By June 1921 the enemy was not moving about very much and when they did move it was in large numbers. Any attempt by the Volunteers to take up ambush positions necessitated large numbers, and due to the limited amount

of rifles available this meant bringing two or more battalion columns together. This meant delay and a lot of organising.

Each battalion column, except when there was reliable information regarding enemy movements, kept their columns active by occupying sniping positions along the main enemy routes. In June 1921, acting on intelligence from Castleisland barracks, about eighty men occupied positions on a by-road near Hedley's Bridge leading to Brosna. It was expected that a party of British military would travel that way with provisions for Brosna garrison. All other roads to the locality were considered to be sufficiently blocked or obstructed and that the British should, in consequence, use this particular route. The Volunteers remained in position for three days, only to discover on the evening of the third day that the lorries had taken a more circuitous route through Lyrecrompane and various by-roads to get to and from their destination.

In June information was received that plans were being made by the British authorities to take over Castleisland library ~~from~~^{for} the military and Auxiliaries. The library at the Cordal end of the main street was a commanding position and, if occupied, it would considerably hamper Volunteer movements. It was ordered to be burned by the brigade. Towards the end of June the Battalion Staff and Column took up positions in the main street and around the military barracks, while everything of value was removed from the library, carted away to safety and the building set on fire. There were several cart loads of books, which were handed over to the Cumann na mBan

for safe keeping. The building was successfully destroyed, and as none of the British garrison appeared out the Volunteers withdrew in the direction of Cordal.

We stayed at Kilquane, Cordal, that night, and the following day, having nothing else on, some of us decided to pay a visit to a battalion engineering camp that was being held at Glountane, Cordal, a short distance away. Tom Fleming, formerly of the Brigade Column, was in charge of the class. He was a native of Currow and had been in my section in the column. I had sworn him into the Volunteers in Tralee in 1918, where he worked as a mechanic before going on the run after participating in the seizure of arms at Tralee railway station. The class was in full swing when we arrived in the afternoon. There were representatives of all the companies of the battalion attending the class. The purpose was to instruct suitable men from each company to prepare and set off a land mine. The explosives used were home-manufactured "Black Powder" made from charcoal and saltpetre. An electric detonator and electric battery were used to set off the charge. The class was assembled on a by-road a short distance off the public road in a very remote and hilly part of the area. There was little danger of surprise from the enemy so there was no guard out locally. The instructor carried out a demonstration and for the purpose he had filled the iron box of a horse cart wheel with black powder. One end of the box he had previously sealed up with a block of wood while he packed the powder gently into the 'box' through the open end. We were all interested in the demonstration and were seated on the side of the road in two rows facing each other, with our legs into the dyke of the road. I was directly in front of Tom

Fleming, the instructor, with my back against the earthen fence. He had previously cautioned all about the danger of smoking and the electric battery and wires were put carefully aside while the filling was going on. He had the 'box' between his knees. The man on the other side of him was holding the 'box' steady while he packed in the last of the powder and drove in with a hammer the plug of wood intended to seal the second end and through which wire from the detonator extended. The conversation was general. An aeroplane passed overhead going towards Cork. As the day was very fine and clear somebody suggested that we should remain motionless as the plane passed as we could be seen. Someone else suggested blowing up the plane. Scarcely were the words uttered when there was a loud explosion. I was blown back against the fence, while through a dense smoke I could see men scrambling on either side of me. I thought the plane had dropped a bomb. I got to my feet and stumbled over somebody. I lifted up the body. It was Tom Fleming. The smoke was clearing and I said something. The man I had lifted recognised my voice and said "For God's sake put a bullet through me". I could notice clearly his mangled body while I tried to console him. I sent for priest and doctor, though realising that he had no need for the latter, while he repeated the act of contrition after me. He was bleeding from several gashes in his legs, head, hands and body. I endeavoured to stop the main arteries with assistance, hoping to keep him alive until the priest arrived, but gradually he grew fainter and fainter until finally, after about ten minutes, he passed out. There was no time for sentiment. Others were rolling in agony round me. I turned my attention to them and found two of them in a bad way. The flesh

was burning off them. They had got a blast of the powder in the face and clothes, as well as some cuts from flying scrap. There were others with less injuries lying around so I had a look at them and concentrated on the more serious cases. After months of treatment under doctor's care they all survived, one with the loss of an eye and a few fingers off.

It was a sad procession as we journeyed from Glountane to Milleen with the dead body of our comrade and to Kilsarkan churchyard the following day when he was laid to rest. The funeral, considering the time and the danger, was immense and was vividly representative of all adjacent parishes.

It was when the excitement was over that I realised how close the call must have been for others of us. My coat pocket had been completely blown away. A piece of scrap must have passed between me and my neighbour on my left, so that must have been a close one for both of us. We could never agree as to what caused the explosion, but the general opinion was that it was friction set up by the plug of wood resulting in a spark.

On June the 29th, as a result of information from Cork, positions were taken up on the Castleisland - Cork road at Knockeenahone above Scartaglin by columns from Castleisland, Firies and Rathmore Battalions. The military force expected was a big one and in all about 100 men held positions there for about a week, but nothing turned up. I understood that all roads leading from Kerry were similarly manned, but I think the party we expected went by Limerick.

The battalion had been very active for the past few

months, yet the Castleisland garrison were always able to elude the net. Except for the shooting of a Head Constable and a Sergeant in Castleisland in May, when on their way from Mass, by four members of Castleisland Company armed with revolvers, there was no evidence of Volunteer activity.

A patrol of military or Tans and sometimes a mixed patrol used to come out into the town of Castleisland to enforce the curfew. The route of the patrol was generally up the main street to the ^{LIBRARY} railway and down again to the barracks. When they came out in the street they fired one shot to warn the people that it was curfew time and time to be indoors in compliance with martial law. The I.R.A. had tried on a couple of occasions to ambush this patrol but it was a coincidence that the patrol remained indoors whenever the I.R.A. were in the vicinity in strength. It would, of course, have been easy to have one or two of the I.R.A. have a few shots at them on the nights they came out, but both the brigade and battalion were hoping to make a complete job of it if they could get in to the town in strength on a night the patrol came out. For some days prior to July 10th, 1921, battalion intelligence indicated that they were coming out on certain nights, including the night of July 10th. Arrangements were, therefore, made by the brigade to attack the patrol on that night.

For this purpose about eight men from Ballymacelligott Company went to Scartaglin where the Castleisland Battalion Column were in training. On Sunday the 10th July there were, therefore, about fifty men, including Brigade and Battalion Staff Officers, 'standing to' in Scartaglin ready to go into Castleisland that night to engage the

curfew patrol which was due on the street at 8 p.m. At about 2 p.m. a dispatch was received from the Battalion Intelligence Castleisland to the effect that the patrol was not coming out. On receipt of this information the trip to town was called off and the column was dismissed for the evening. The evening was delightfully warm and sunny and the members of the column, being free until midnight, availed of the opportunity to enjoy themselves or attend to home matters. Some went to their own homes, some to other company areas, and in a short while all were scattered. The Brigade and Battalion Staffs, however, were still in the vicinity of Scartaglin village when, at about 3 p.m., another messenger came from Castleisland with word that the patrol was coming out for certain that night. This messenger was no less a person than the informant himself, who had sneaked out of the barracks and taken the risk of being found out by cycling the five miles to Scartaglin with the information.

The Brigade and Battalion Officers present, which included the Brigade and Battalion O/C, held a consultation immediately and, as it was then assumed that all the column could be rounded up on short notice, decided to go ahead with the original plan and attack the patrol in the vicinity of the library at the top of the town. Messengers were immediately sent out to collect the men and also transport to take them through Cordal to within a couple of miles of the town. The messengers found it difficult to locate any few of the column and other messengers were sent out, but the majority of the column could not be traced. After some hours of delay the Brigade Officers were told of the position and they decided to go ahead with the number present, about thirty in all.

We travelled by side-car to within a couple of miles of Castleisland. We were on the Cordal-Castleisland road. The side-cars were ordered home and the remainder of the journey was done on foot and some on bicycles. At the road junction linking the Cordal and ~~Kilouamin~~^{KILCUSSIN} roads the Brigade O/C (Humphrey Murphy) divided those present into three sections. The Brigade and Battalion Officers were to take up position in the library ruins. Ned McCarthy was to take a section on into position on the left of the street adjacent to the library. Paddy Reidy, Ballymacelligott, was to take up position on the right of the street. Both sections were to put out flankers.

There were less than thirty men present, and as another section was reported coming along a couple of miles back the road a scout was left to bring these to another position on the right of the street in the vicinity of the Limerick road. The patrol was to be allowed as close as possible to the library before fire was opened on them, and fire was to be opened first by the party in the library ruins:.

I, having just arrived as the orders were being given, fell in at the rear of Ned McCarthy's section. We moved off across the fields adjacent to the road, each section taking the shortest route to its own position. The sun shone brilliantly. We heard the shot ring out that told us that the patrol was on the street. The shot was a warning to all inhabitants to get indoors. Thereafter the street was empty, only the step of the patrol breaking the silence that settled over the town. The curfew shot made us quicken our paces. We had yet a few hundred yards to go to get into our position, which

we should be in before the patrol came in to the line of fire. As we doubled across the fields I realised our numbers were inadequate to meet a strong patrol or to risk a delay which would allow reinforcements to come from the barracks. Our two flankers could be seen away out on our left towards the river Maine where they were going into position. With only the road dividing us I saw the library section going into position. About 30 yards from the library on our side was a little laneway or yard entrance. Somebody suggested leaving a man or two there and the Section Commander looking back said: "One of ye better stay there", indicating myself or Jack Prendiville; we were coming along together. "You stay there" I said to Jack. He replied "Oh no" and explained that he'd rather go on with the lads. I did not realise then that that was the last I was to see of Jack alive and two others of the section. I went to the corner of the lane and saw the patrol coming up the street. The head of it was about 100 yards from me. I examined the position. If the patrol came right up to the library the main body would be in front of me. When fire was opened up I would have to take up a position back from the corner while the patrol was passing, with the intention of taking up a secondary position. As the patrol drew near I lay on the ground at the corner of the lane with my rifle trained on it as it moved along with a steady step and rifles at the ready.

All was quiet. Not a sound save the tread of the marching men. The people in the houses across the street saw me and the blinds were drawn. The leading file of the patrol was about 60 yards from the library when suddenly a lone shot (accidentally) comes from the library. The

patrol rushed for cover under a hail of fire. Some rushed for doorways, only to find them closed, and they had to take cover standing in the depression of the door, availing of what cover they could get from the door jambs. Others threw themselves flat in the street or into the water-table (gully), while others made a dash back down the street towards the barracks. For a short while the fire was intense from our positions and the Tans who were in positions, to do so kept up a steady return fire. Gradually the return fire ceased. The Tans had either all taken cover or were engaged by the section on the right lower down the street, from which noise of shooting could be heard.

The remainder of my section had taken up position in an archway about 100 yards down from where ~~we~~^{THEY} had retrieved two rifles thrown on the street by two fleeing Tans and were occupied endeavouring to discharge ^{LOADS} a Tan from the shelter of an adjoining doorway. The section on the right, from their position in the burying ground, were intercepting the Tans fleeing towards the barracks. Time was speeding by when the retreat whistle sounded from the library ruins. From my position I could see the men in the library withdrawing. I whistled for my men at both the front and rear of the buildings. I waited for a while but as they were not coming I decided to join the others whom I could see retreating. I saw the flankers on the right retreating. It was quiet on the street so I went out on the street and walked along the footpath towards the end of the town. I caught up with the Brigade and Battalion Officers and reported the remainder of my section missing. I suggested that we take up new positions in Dr. Rice's yard until the missing men came up.

We waited there a while. We were in a covering position from which we could see down the street for a couple of hundred yards and away to our left to the rear of the main street. Everything was quiet. There was no firing. It had become dusky and as there was no appearance from the men of either of the other sections, it was suggested that they may have decided to retreat in other directions. There were local men with both sections. We were ordered to retreat, and as we retreated across the fields in the direction of Cordal there was sound of heavy firing away in the distance on the lower end of the town. We stopped about a mile from the town. It was almost dark at this time. Three hours must have elapsed since we went into the town. The firing round the town got heavy and it was coming from the position we had vacated. We took up positions again for a while wondering what was taking place. The firing died away and we moved on again.

In the meantime things had not gone on so well with the men in the town. The section on our right in the burial ground about 300 yards from the library were outside the line of fire at the attack on the patrol, so they lay low and awaited the Tans when they made a dash back down the street to the barracks. Then they engaged the Tans as they came into view. They had not heard the whistle for the retreat sounded from the library and decided to withdraw, when suddenly they were engaged by a party of military from a road on their right which ran at right angles to the main street. The military had a machine gun in action against them. They were pinned down but returned the fire. The gardens at the rear of the houses on the main street gave scanty cover for a retreat to the library, so they decided to make for the open country

to the north, taking advantage of the wynds of hay to give them cover. They thought that with the dusk of evening falling they could reach safety across the open fields. Two of the party took cover in a potato garden while the military moved forward. The military, having cleared the burial ground, advanced at the double towards the library along the rear of the houses. They were now joined by the Tans looking for revenge. They converged at the library ruins where they found everything quiet.

The five I.R.A. men who were in the archway on the left of the street from the library also heard the retreat whistle go, but they were so intent on dislodging a Tan from a position in a gateway near them that they lost track of time. As they were about to move away, however, the terrific fire at the lower end of the town slowed them up. They finally decided to retreat along the route they came in where only the road would be between them and the library. They moved through the gardens and yards at the rear of the houses. As they approached heavy fire was opened on them. They turned back to retreat some other direction when they came under fire from the rear. The enemy were closing in from two sides. They returned the fire from the cover of an old quarry and decided to dash for a fence about 100 yards away. They were five in the party and the five made the dash. Two succeeded in getting there but the other three couldn't make it and were pinned down in the quarry. One of the three left in the quarry made a second dash in the direction of the fence but turned back. The two men who had reached the fence, Ned McCarthy and Moss GALVIN Geenan, went on expecting the three to ~~they~~ ^{try} again, but

instead they went back down under a hail of fire towards the gardens and were lost from view. They were pinned down and as night closed in they fought it out until their last bullets were spent.

No one knows for certain what happened in the final stages. Their dead mangled bodies were found later that night. Jack Prendiville, Jack Flynn and Dick Shanahan had made the supreme sacrifice. The following day, the day of the truce, was a sad day for their comrades when they took over the three bodies from the military for interment in Castleisland.

Signed:

Peter Browne

(Peter Browne)

Date:

7/3/55

Witness:

James J. O'Connor (James J. O'Connor)
(Investigator)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILLTA 1913-21

NO. W.S. 1110