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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

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Witness

Commandant Martin Fallon,
Tomona,
Tulsk,
Co. Roscommon.

Identity.

Q.M. No. 3 Battalion, North
Roscommon Brigade.

Subject.

Third Battalion, North Roscommon Brigade,
1917-1921.

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ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21/121

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1121

STATEMENT BY COMMANDANT MARTIN FALLON (Retired)

Tomona. Tulsk. Co. Roscommon.

I was born in Curraghroe, Co. Roscommon, and went to school there. Our teacher at school was very keen on Irish History and I would say this had a decided bearing on my actions in the fight for independence later on.

Bill Doherty of Elphin was organising the Volunteers in the Strokestown area and he took me into the organisation. This was in the early part of 1917 and was around the time of the Plunkett election. A company was now formed in Curraghroe and consisted originally of five men - Brian Nangle, Jim Kelly, Pat Greene, Willie Shiels and me. Nangle acted as instructor and we had drill parades once weekly and paid a small subscription of a few pence per week towards an armament fund and other expenses. We had no arms of any description at this time.

During the Plunkett election we were all busily engaged working for the return of the Count. Father O'Flanagan was in the area then and was untiring in his efforts in this respect. We were engaged in canvassing, checking registers of voters, attending meetings, arranging transport for the voters and suchlike work. Snow fell heavily in the area during the election period and this added considerably to our difficulties.

By the end of 1917 our Volunteer strength had only increased slightly. We were very particular then about the type of young man we would take into the Volunteers and had to be satisfied beyond any shadow of doubt as to their reliability and that they could be trusted not to talk and ^{BE ABLE TO} keep a secret. ₁₎ There was no such thing as a battalion organisation existing at this time, just small units of men in different areas which were really the nucleus of companies.

Things went on quietly enough into 1918 until the

the conscription crisis came upon us. Now our strength increased rapidly, but we still kept on being selective in the men we took on and, as a result, our strength did not pass 50 all told. We still had no arms and nothing particular was done to combat the threat of conscription. We did, of course, make a census of all arms which were only shotguns that were available in the area and the supply of cartridges for them. The guns were tabulated so that they could easily be collected if an emergency was declared. A collection was made for the anti-conscription fund and a goodly sum of money was received. This was held by the local priest. The Volunteers were also instrumental in having the anti-conscription pledge signed by all the people.

Brian Nangle was now O/C. of the Curraghroe Company, Willie Shiels was 1st Lieutenant, and I was 2nd Lieutenant. When the conscription crisis was over all our men that had been taken on during the period continued to be active members. This could be put down to our discretion in being selective of the men we took on and was in contrast to other areas where men had been taken on wholesale and where defections were wholesale after the crisis.

In the end of 1918 a General Election was held and we were all busily engaged in work for this - canvassing, arranging transport, protecting speakers at meetings, etc. On polling day men were placed on duty at each polling station. All such men were armed with home made batons. I was at Curraghroe and there was no trouble there; the people of that area were mostly on our side. At Aughnaderry, however, the National or Redmondite elements removed a tricolour (which was the flag of Sinn Fein) from where it was flying over the local school and ran our men out of the place. We were informed of this and we got a few cars and proceeded there and re-hoisted the flag and dispersed the Redmond element. Some of our

supporters in this area had been stopped from casting their vote and we now saw to it that they were allowed to do so. That night the Volunteers escorted the ballot boxes to Roscommon where a Volunteer guard was on duty on them all night. The R.I.C. also had a guard on them. The R.I.C. were favourable to the Redmond supporters and generally looked with a blind eye on their actions.

Early in 1919 the First Dáil met and soon assumed responsibility for the Volunteers and, having affirmed the declaration of the Republic, we now became/^{the} recognised army of that State. Every officer and Volunteer was now required to take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil as the Government of the Republic. All our men subscribed to this oath and we now became the I.R.A. although the organisation continued to be referred to more often as the Irish Volunteers. The Dáil now floated a loan and we collected moneys for this and were well supported by the people. The moneys subscribed to fight conscription were still held by the priest and he announced that it would be returned to the subscribers one Sunday after Mass outside the chapel gate. On that Sunday the priest and his helpers had a table on one side of the gate where the moneys were being returned to the people, and we had another table on the other side where we were taking subscriptions for the loan. The people did not expect to have this money returned to them and the vast majority of them walked over to us on receiving it and put it into the loan. I don't suppose they ever expected to get it back from there either, but they eventually did. Pat Green and Jim Kelly acted as agents for the loan.

We still had no arms in our unit except a few shotguns which were the private property of some of our members. I had one .22 rifle with which we did some firing practice. I also had a .38 revolver and ten rounds of ammunition for it.

I purchased this revolver from a man in Lanesboro' named Fallon and paid him £2 for it.

By this time, North Roscommon had become a brigade area. Seamus Ryan of Strokestown was the Brigade O/C., Michael Dockery was Vice O/C. Brigade, Martin Killilea of Doon, Boyle, was Brigade Q.M. The brigade comprised the following battalion areas:- No. 1 Boyle; No. 2 Elphin; No. 3 Strokestown; No. 4 Ballinameen. Jim Feely was O/C. No. 1; John Owens No. 2; Bill Doherty No. 3 and John Kelly No. 4. Ernie O'Malley had come down to the area from G.H.Q. and he visited each company area in turn and carried out quite a lot of training with them. He was organising the I.R.B. at this time also and it was around this time that I joined that organisation. O'Malley held training classes for officers at Green's of Kilglass where his H.Q. was. Classes were held nightly and nearly all the officers in the brigade area underwent this course. He covered such subjects as drill, musketry and the use of arms generally.

Early in 1920, the R.I.C., as a result of attacks and capture of some of their barracks throughout the country, started evacuating their smaller posts and concentrating their forces in larger centres principally in the towns. In our district Scramogue, Tulsk and Kilglass were evacuated and all those three were destroyed by us on Easter Saturday night 1920 by burning. Soon after, we learned from the daily Press that this was a nation-wide operation and it was very gratifying to see how the I.R.A. had acted as one unit throughout the country and also how secretly kept the instructions were despite the large numbers that were aware of it. The R.I.C. were now concentrated in Strokestown, Roscommon, Boyle and Elphin principally, but they also strengthened considerably their garrisons at Tarmonbarry, Lanesboro and Rooskey which were the crossing places on the Shannon and were of vital

importance to them. There were also crossings at Athlone and Carrick-on-Shannon which held large garrisons of military.

Later in the year 1920, a general raid or collection of arms was ordered by G.H.Q. Apparently, information had reached G.H.Q. that the British authorities were going to take up all arms in the country and we were ordered to forestall them in this. We had carried out some raiding prior to this and collected some shotguns and ammunition. In the general raid now we collected one sporting type of rifle with a magazine, either a .32 or .38, and a box of ammunition containing about 25 rounds and about 15 shotguns, double and single barrel type. I now got a Lee Enfield service rifle from Dockery for training purposes. This rifle was the property of brigade headquarters.

One night, while raiding for arms, two of us - Volunteer Noone and I - got slightly wounded by shotgun pellets. The owner of the house we knew had a Mauser rifle and a shotgun. I went to the door and knocked while Noone was behind me armed with a shotgun. A man appeared at an upstairs window. Noone pulled back the hammer of the shotgun to cock it and, somehow, discharged a shot. The shot ricocheted off the wall of the house and entered my legs. Volunteer Paddy Shiels also got some pellets in the back of his leg. I was not seriously wounded, nor was Shiels, and I was able to cycle home afterwards. We got the Mauser rifle and the shotgun all right. The rifle was a German sporting-type weapon. We also got some ammunition for each type of weapon. The arms were dumped in the chapel gallery under the floorboards and a man was detailed to look after them.

In December 1920, three other Volunteers and I went into Tarmonbarry to try and contact a patrol of police and hit them up. We were armed with four shotguns. We found two Tans coming out of a publichouse and we fired on them, wounding

one of them. They did not return our fire, nor did they fire from the barracks either. One Tan made back into a publichouse and the other got into the barracks. We had no casualties. Casey, Shiels, Moran and, I think, Lynam were the other Volunteers who were with me on this occasion.

I was now appointed battalion quartermaster to replace Cox who held that appointment and who was now arrested by the British forces. The battalion comprised the companies of Scramogue-Kilglass-Carnaskagh-Curraghroe. There was no company in Strokestown or Cloonfree. The O/C. of the battalion was Bill Doherty of Elphin. The company commanders were Paddy Cox, Scramogue; John Shiels, Carnaskagh; Michael Green, Kilglass, and Brian Nangle, Curraghroe. The companies were about 40 strong all ranks, or about 160 the battalion. For armament, we had two service Lee Enfield rifles (we had got a second one from the brigade) and a number of shotguns varying from 10 to 20 in each company area. There were a few revolvers in the battalion of various calibres and with a very limited supply of ammunition for same. Some of the revolvers were of the pin-fire type. Cartridges for the shotguns were also limited. We also had one hand grenade.

Towards the end of 1920, an active service unit - better known as a flying column - was formed in the battalion area. I was appointed in charge of this unit which comprised about 15 men. Some of these men were 'on the run', as they were wanted by the British, but a number were not and could sleep at home. The column had three service rifles with 20 rounds of ammunition for each rifle, and the remainder were armed with shotguns, the cartridges for which were filled with buckshot. It was very hard to keep the cartridge for the shotguns in condition as they were very liable to swelling from damp unless stored under ideal conditions.

We also had four or five British army uniforms which had been taken from soldiers around Strokestown. There was a large force of British Cavalry - Lancers - stationed in the demesne at Strokestown at this time, commanded by a Captain Peak who was afterwards killed at Scramogue. We also had one hand grenade, 5 or 6 revolvers of different types and a few rounds for each. We also had two Parabellum pistols which Sean Connolly had brought from G.H.Q. to us. In the end of 1920 Connolly had come to the area on an organising mission and there were now some changes made in the brigade officer personnel. Mick Dockery, who was formerly Brigade Vice Commandant, now became Brigade O/C., while the Brigade O/C., Ryan, became Vice-Commandant Brigade. Patrick Mullooly, who had been in Dublin, returned to the area and was appointed Brigade Q.M., while Sean Glancy became Brigade Adjutant.

On taking charge of the flying column I relinquished my appointment as Battalion Q.M. and was succeeded by Brian Nangle. There was also two further battalions organised, as well as I can remember, Kilmore and Arigna. James Dorr was O/C. Kilmore Battalion, and Jim Cull, Arigna. Shiels was appointed O/C. Curraghroe Company to replace Brian Nangle.

The men of the column who were 'on the run' were billeted by the local people who also supplied them with food. We also constructed three dugouts which we occupied later in the year when the weather improved: one at Scramogue, one at Curraghroe, and the third in the Islands. We supplied our own clothing or got them somehow. We did get some boots free. Shevlin of Strokestown had ordered a supply of boots for his business premises. He was in that trade. Before the boots arrived he had to go 'on the run' and clear out and when the boots arrived they were lying at the station undelivered. I learned of this and told Dockery, the Brigade O/C., about it. He had them taken over and brought to Hillstreet, the Brigade H.Q.,

where they were placed in a stores under the charge of one man. I was in Hillstreet one day and requested that I be given some of the boots for my men. The caretaker refused and I had to take them forcibly. Otherwise, I don't think I would ever have got them.

The first operation carried out by the column was an attack on Tarmonbarry R.I.C. Barracks and also an attack on patrols in Strokestown. Both operations were planned for the same night. I had 15 men of the column with me together with some of the local company for the attack on Tarmonbarry, while others of the column went into Strokestown under Bill Doherty. We took up a position in the front and rear of the barracks at Tarmonbarry Barracks and opened fire. We had no ideas that we could capture the barracks, which was a very strong point, well fortified with sandbags and barbed wire and steel shutters on the windows and had a number of Lewis' guns amongst its armament. It was garrisoned by a force of R.I.C. and Tans. Our attack was purely of a harassing nature. We continued to fire at the barracks for over an hour. Our ammunition was very limited and so our effort was not very concentrated - just sufficient to keep them annoyed and to force them to use up ammunition. The garrison of the barracks, as well as wasting an amount of their ammunition, sent up numerous Verey lights calling for assistance. After about an hour we called off the attack and, having reassembled our force, proceeded to a position on the main road about a mile or so on the Strokestown side of Tarmonbarry. We expected that reinforcements for the Tarmonbarry garrison would come from Strokestown. We occupied an ambush position at this point on the road for some hours, but no reinforcements came out.

We had no casualties or injuries to any of our men.. Sergeant Smith, who was in charge of the R.I.C. at Tarmonbarry, was killed that night but not by our fire. We learned that he

was in the act of firing a Verey light pistol when it either exploded or the light rebounded off a wall and killed him. That was the only casualty we heard of that the garrison had. Doherty, who had some of the best men of the column with him, had even worse luck. He spent a considerable time in Strokestown, but could not make any contact with the enemy. They had no patrols out that night.

The column now returned to the Curraghroe area and remained in that area until February when I took the whole party into Tarmonbarry again. This time our object was an enemy foot patrol that was in the habit of going out towards Rooskey at night. This patrol sometimes came back directly and at other times returned by another road. I had scouted this area and had made my plans selecting an assembly position from which I could quickly bring my men into an ambush position on either road according to which road the patrol was returning by. A local I.R.A. officer was detailed to follow the patrol and report back to me by which road it was returning. He had a cycle for this purpose. I moved my men to the assembly position and awaited the report of the officer scout. He returned to my position and informed me that they were returning by the road they had gone out. I moved my men to deal with this position and occupied an ambush position and, although we remained there until 2 a.m. in the morning, no patrol ever showed up. I subsequently learned that the patrol had returned by the other road and were safe and snug in barracks while we were lying waiting for them - and had been back by 11 p.m.

I also learned that our officer scout had deliberately misled us as to the enemy movements and had given us wrong information. He also knew that the patrol was back in barracks at 11 p.m. but he did not inform us of this. He did not want an ambush to take place near his own home. I

suppose he was afraid of reprisals. It was a puzzle what to do with this officer. He was one of the original officers of the Volunteers and was well liked, and shooting him appeared drastic and might have local complications. Eventually, it was decided that he would be dismissed from the Volunteers and this was done. After this abortive attempt we returned to Curraghroe area again.

About a week after the previous incident I took the column into Tarmonbarry again in an effort to get this patrol. This time we did not depend on any local scouts. We took over three houses on the main Tarmonbarry-Strokestown road about 600 yards distant from the barracks. We occupied two of the houses by our men and put the residents of the two into the third under guard. Patrick Mulooly, the Brigade Q.M., accompanied us on this occasion. We entered the houses at 4 a.m. on the morning and remained in occupation of them until 9 p.m. on the following night, but no patrol ever came out from the barracks, so we were obliged to pull out and return to Curraghroe again. When we were handing back the houses we had occupied to their owners, one of them, an old man, reported that a sum of money had been stolen on him. I took a very serious view of this, as anything in the nature of stealing or pilfering by Volunteers was considered a very serious affair and would undermine the dignity and esteem in which the organisation was held by the people. I pointed out to the man that the only money we had seen was a few odd pence which had fallen out of an old vest when we were barricading the house that morning and that it was still on the mantelpiece where I had left it. He informed me that when we had knocked at his door early that morning that he had concealed a roll of notes - £6 - in a bag of pig meal before he opened the door to us and that it was now gone. We went to the bag of meal and after looking round for a few seconds, we found the roll

of notes on the floor beside the bag. There was a pig in the outoffice outside the house which, from hunger, was making an awful amount of noise and liable to draw attention on the house. One of our men decided that the pig would have to be fed and, getting a basin, took a feed of meal to the pig. While getting the meal from the bag the money must have dropped on to the floor. It was lucky that the notes did not get in with the meal in the basin or else the pig would have been a better one.

Around this time there was stationed in Strokestown a Sergeant Hopkins of the R.I.C. Hopkins was a much-wanted man by our side and we were all anxious to get a shot at him. He had made himself notorious by his illtreatment of our members that were made prisoners by his side. He was wont to beat and kick them unmercifully and there are many men in the Strokestown area who still bear visible marks of his evil doings.

I knew Hopkins - he was a man of 40 years of age, 6ft. or over in height. He had steel-grey hair and a moustache. One night while I was away in Ballinameen some of the column, with my consent, went into Strokestown to see if they could get Hopkins. Jim Casey took charge of this party and, on entering Strokestown, they split up in parties of two or so to scout the different streets and premises for their quarry. Volunteer Brehon, who accompanied Casey, went into a publichouse next door to the barracks. This was at 8 p.m. and curfew was at 9 p.m. Brehon spotted a sergeant of the R.I.C. in the publichouse. He looked at him and decided he was the man they were looking for. Brehon called for a drink and, having consumed it, came out to Casey and told him that a man answering to Hopkins' description was inside. Casey said that he would know him when out the door walked the man. Casey said: "It is him all right". There were no lights on the streets at

this time. They opened fire on the man and shot him dead against the wall, just as he was going to enter barracks.

It was the wrong man they had shot. It was a Sergeant McArdle who had only come to Strokestown a short while before and against whom nothing out of the ordinary was known. Strange to relate, Sergeant McArdle answered the description of Sergt. Hopkins in every way except that he was at least 10 years older and, stranger still, the R.I.C. or Tans did not carry out any reprisals for his death. Hopkins was never got and served on until the R.I.C. were disbanded.

After the Hopkins affair the next incident of note was the ambush at Scramogue. The column at this time was billeted in the Curraghroe area where we had a dugout constructed. I was with Pat Madden and Luke Duffy of the South Roscommon Brigade and we were discussing where an ambush could be held. I might mention that Curraghroe was a half parish of Ballagh and Madden, Duffy and I were fast friends. When the brigades - North and South Roscommon - were organised, the parish was cut in half. It was suggested that Scramogue would be a suitable place. South Roscommon was not at all suitable as it was comparatively flat and open. Madden, Duffy and I met at Scramogue one night later to survey the position. Sean Leavy, whose house was actually on the site of the suggested ambush position, met us there and, when Madden said to him that this house would probably go up after the ambush, he replied that it did not matter if the ambush was a success. It was decided that the position was suitable and Leavy undertook to have two men continually keep a watch on the road and record the passing and time of enemy lorries. Leavy reported shortly afterwards that two enemy lorries were proceeding from Strokestown to Longford early each morning and so we decided to ambush them.

Madden got in touch with me again and arranged that I

would take my column and he would take his to Scramogue on 23rd March 1921. Men from the battalion were detailed to block all the roads leading north, including Elphin, Rooskey, Longford and Curraghroe, while men from Madden's area were detailed to carry out similar operation on the south side. The Longford road was blocked to keep us from being surprised in the rear.

We arrived at Scramogue at about 5 o'clock in the morning and Madden arrived there at the same time with his men. I had 12 or 15 Volunteers under my command armed with four service rifles and the remainder with shotguns and some revolvers. The Scramogue road, which is the main Strokestown-Longford road, bends sharply to the northeast at the point of ambush which was a few hundred yards west of Scramogue village and then veers eastwards rather gradually again. There is a road junction at the bend with a third class road which runs south west along the foothill of Slievebawn. There were some houses on this road near the junction which played an important part in the ambush. The ground on the east side of the road bend was ideal and gave command of the road leading from Strokestown for a considerable distance as also did the houses. In fact, from this high ground one could observe the road almost to where it bends sharply south of the town of Strokestown. The ground to the east of the bend and which is the northern slope of Slieve Bawn gave good cover for a retreat from the position and this was further facilitated by a boreen or lane which runs eastwards from the third class road and near the road junction. The main road near the bend and towards the west was fenced by stone walls, the one on the northern side extending for some distance round the bend. On the east side of the road at the bend there was only a thorn hedge and no trench or dyke and we had to dig a trench along this fence to provide a firing position for our

men. We had to remove the inhabitants from four or five houses already referred to and put them under guard in a house up at the village on the Ashbrook road. There were 10 or 15 people including women and children.

We made loopholes in one of the houses for two riflemen to cover the Strokestown road while the remainder of both columns took up positions in the trench we had dug behind the hedge and in some of the other houses which was our left flank. Some men were also put across the main road on the north side to protect our right flank and to deal with any enemy that might get across the wall on the roadside and into the fields there. The road to Longford at our rear was blocked and guarded to prevent surprise from that side.

Two expert riflemen were placed on the house that was loopholed - John Gibbons and 'Buzzer' Farrell. Both of these men had served in the Irish Guards during the 1914-1918 War. We expected two lorries of enemy as had been reported by the scouts who were watching the road previously. The instructions or orders given to the men at the loopholes were that they were to allow the first lorry to come into shotgun range of our main party behind the hedge and then to shoot the driver of the vehicle. Then all other men of ours armed with rifles were to deal with the second lorry while the men armed with shotguns would deal with the first one. The remainder of the two columns as a mixed force occupied the trench behind the road hedge and other positions on the left and right flank. Madden's men had, I think, more rifles than mine and were better armed. Behind the hedge our men were made to lie down in the trench and keep under cover while Captain Murphy of Scramogue, who was a member of my column, took up a position where he could observe the road to Strokestown through a slit in the hedge and inform us when the enemy were approaching. All our men were provided with a light meal before taking up position.

At about 7.30 or 8 a.m. Captain Murphy gave the alarm that an enemy lorry was approaching from Strokestown containing military and Tans and that it had a machine gun mounted. We lay low until fire was opened by our two riflemen in the loopholed house. The lorry - a Crossley tender - stopped dead exactly on the spot we wanted it to. We afterwards found that the driver had been shot dead behind the steering wheel and had just slumped back in his seat. We now all opened fire with what weapons we had, rifles and shotguns. The gunner on the tender succeeded in getting off one short burst from his gun when he was killed also. Two military officers, Captain Peak and Lieutenant Tennant, who were sitting in the front seat beside the driver, jumped from the lorry and on to the wall on the left of it and crossed over the wall but were shot in doing so. In a few minutes there was no further resistance or shooting from the enemy and it appeared as if they had been all wiped out and we got up out of our position and on to the road. Captain Peak had got over a fence into one of the fields close to the road and had fallen into the drain or dyke of this where he was dead. Lieutenant Tennant was behind the wall, horribly wounded - his intestines were hanging out, having been apparently hit by the shotgun men whose cartridges were loaded with buckshot. He was still conscious, however, and I asked him where was his gun and he said 'There' and made an effort to point to where it was lying beside him. He was actually riddled with wounds as far as I could see. I took his gun and ammunition. The remainder of the crew of the tender were lying around the road either dead or wounded and one Black and Tan was also badly wounded. To our surprise, two Tans in civilian clothes extricated themselves from the mess and surrendered themselves to us. Neither of them had been hit; at first when I saw them I thought that they were I.R.A. prisoners, that the enemy had

on the lorry, but quickly discovered that they were Tans.

The enemy's armament was now quickly collected including the machine gun which was a hotchkiss and a number of rifles and a couple of boxes of ammunition. There was also one grenade on the front seat of the tender. We also collected the equipment of the crew and, having removed the wounded Tan from the body of the tender, it was well saturated with petrol which, conveniently enough, was in tins in the body of tender and set alight.

As a large force of Lancers - Captain Peak's men - were stationed in the Demesne only roughly a quarter of a mile away from us, we could not afford to delay around the place or to give any assistance to the wounded. The Lancers, being a mounted force, could quickly move across country and, once having made contact with us, it would have been nearly impossible to shake them off. The horses made them very mobile and capable of crossing fields and hedges rapidly, so to us, so to speak, it was saddle up and get away quickly. Captain Murphy had also told us when he alarmed us of the approach of the tender that a second lorry containing all Tans was following the first at a good distance behind, I did not see this lorry at any time and it certainly did not come near the ambush position. It was said afterwards that when the occupants of the second lorry heard the firing to their front they turned the vehicle round on the road and returned to Strokestown. There had been about nine enemy in the tender that came into the ambush position.

We now quickly marshalled our men and with our two Tan prisoners in civilian attire started our retreat. I took one of the prisoners and Madden took the other and we all headed across the northern slope of Slieve Bawn. After proceeding some distance we split up, Madden and his men making their way towards Ballagh, while I made a line for Curraghroe. No

conference was held and no decision made as to what we were to do with the prisoners. Madden had the Hotchkiss gun and a couple of rifles and some of the ammunition captured, and I had the remaining rifles and the rest of the ammunition. No proper division of the booty was made. It was not necessary, as Madden and I were close friends and either side could borrow or lend to the other at any time without trouble.

We got back to Curraghroe and called at Nerney's and got some food there and rested for a while in a field about half a mile from Nerney's. Meanwhile, two men who were not part of my column - Pat Mullooly and Brian Nangle - but who were with us, left the main body and got caught by enemy forces which had quickly moved into the area. Mullooly had a revolver on him and Nangle had some ammunition. This alerted the enemy to the fact that we were in that area and made the position very serious for us. We could hear the shooting that took place at the arrest of those two men, but did not know then what it was and could not afford to expose ourselves

The enemy now dropped men in parties all along the Lanesborough, Scramogue Road and along the Curraghroe road. We were now inside a cordon with the Shannon behind us, and had the enemy pressed into the fields after us we were in a bad position. They did not do so and occupied their time searching the houses and their precincts along the roads. We had to remain where we were all day. Meanwhile, some of our men who were not at this time wanted by the enemy went to their homes in the area and, although some of them were picked up they were all released again.

The enemy pulled off their forces just before dark and we were then able to move again and we got on to the Shannon where we had a dugout. We decided that our prisoner would have to be executed. Had he regained his freedom he would have been able to identify every man that was in the column and, in addition, it was only natural he would have gained a lot of information about us, and he certainly knew the area

around Curraghroe where we were wont to hang out. That night two other men and I took him to the bank of the Shannon with the intention of drowning him. We intended taking him out in a boat to mid-river and, having tied a heavy stone to him, put him overboard. The two Volunteers who were with me went off some little distance to get a boat and I stood guard over the Tan with a revolver ready in my hand. We had not bound or gagged him and I started to tell him that he was going to be executed and that he should start saying his prayers. He had no religion apparently. He suddenly lunged out with his right fist and hit me on the point of the jaw. The blow put me down on my knees and partly dazed me but I still had the gun in my hand. Had he followed up his attack he could have kicked me on the head while I was partly dazed, but instead, he turned and jumped into the river. I quickly recovered and fired at what I thought was him in the act of swimming. After that there was no sign of him and the water was quiet.

The men who had gone to get the boat were now returning with it and I ran down the bank to meet them. The river was in flood at this time and the boat had got caught in a wire fence which protruded into the river. It took a few minutes to get it clear and then I got into it and we proceeded to where the Tan had jumped into the river, keeping alert for any sounds of a man swimming. It was fairly dark at this time. As we proceeded along the bank to the scene I thought I saw the figure of a man clinging to the branches of a sally or willow tree which bent down towards the river. I put up my revolver and fired at this object and there was a flop as of a man falling into the water. We quickly pulled over to the spot and it was him all right and I had hit him with my shot. We took him into the boat and, having tied a large stone to him, pulled out to the centre of the river and dumped him overboard. Buchanan was his name.

The enemy forces, after they had captured Mullooly and Nangle, went to Mullooly's house and, after interrogating his younger brother for some time, shot him dead. I believe it was the Auxies did this. They also burned the house at Scramogue which we had loopholed and used in the ambush, and tried to burn another one at *CARNSKAGH* Other than this, they did not carry out any extensive reprisals for the ambush, but there was intense enemy activity all over the area after this and it became increasingly harder to move around at all as there was the continued danger that one would come up against some of their forces. We went up to the Hillstreet area and Dangan area by arrangement with the brigade to try and bring off an ambush there to relieve the pressure on our area, but we had no luck, as the enemy never turned up to oblige us. I appealed to the brigade to have something done in the north end of the county to ease the pressure on us, but nothing was done.

In June 1921, ten members of the column went into Tarmonbarry again to look for a patrol from the garrison there. This patrol was in the habit of crossing over the bridge and going out the Longford road. The days were now very long and the nights consequently short, which was not good for us. We sent a scout into Tarmonbarry to find out what was happening while we waited a quarter of a mile outside the town. The enemy patrol was on foot. The scout returned and reported that the patrol had gone out the Longford road. We had some bombs with us. I brought my men to the schoolhouse on receiving this information.

It was my intention to get down the road near the barracks to a position from which I could throw a bomb at the patrol when it arrived back at the barracks and in the ensuing confusion they would have been a nice target for my men from their position. I had just got to about 100 yards from the

the barracks when the patrol came over the bridge on their return. I lay down and blew a whistle blast which was the pre-arranged signal for my men to open fire. They opened up on the blast of the whistle and the patrol immediately took cover and replied. I was on the ground in the unenviable position of being between the two fires. I succeeded in getting back to my men by crawling. The police in the barracks started throwing out bombs or hand grenades which did not add to the comfort of their men outside. The firing for a while was intense. We got under cover at the gable end of a house and when firing eased off a bit we moved off in single file to the Pile Bridge. It was believed that a number of the enemy were wounded, but we never could find out the exact details. One of them - Sergeant Burke - had two holes in his uniform one bullet grazing his leg through his pants. This attack took place about a fortnight before the Truce and there were no further incidents until that instrument came into force.

We were in good fighting spirit when the Truce came and certainly had no idea of being beaten and the people were supporting us splendidly. None of us thought that the Truce would last long or that England would concede very much. At the same time I did not see how we could very well start again and the longer it lasted the worse this became. The people would not like to undergo another period of raids, arrests and reprisals, probably more intense than previously, after their period of rest from them. Even the Volunteers would be affected by this period of comparative security. It was a grave mistake, I consider, to allow the Volunteers to go into the towns and so forth and, in many cases, to associate with the British forces. The enemy got to know them in this way and their intelligence must have compiled a huge amount of information about us. Again, the Truce did not bring any addition to our armament and what we had would not last very long.

It is no use in saying that we were in a good position to continue the fight - we were not. When the Brigade O/C., Dockery, was arrested I was appointed Brigade O/C., North Roscommon Brigade in his stead. When he escaped I relinquished this appointment again to him and returned to the column. At a meeting held after the Truce to organise the division, all the Brigade O/Cs. indicated that they had no arms and that it would be impossible to start another offensive and that the people were tired and would not stand for a restart of hostilities. The reprisals seemed to have fairly got them down. There were a number of high officers from G.H.Q. at this meeting and I sensed the feelings that they were there to feel out the position and feeling of the army and the people and convey their opinions to G.H.Q. I do believe that had we to start again the people in our area would rally to our support again without delay.

There was another incident that I should have recorded which took place some time before Scramogue ambush. There was a Constable Dennehy stationed in Rooskey. This man was prominent in a shooting affair in Elphin and was wanted by us. One night, two of our men - Mason and Deignan - were staying at Deignan's house at Slatta near Rooskey. The Constable came out the road with a girl and Mason and Deignan held him up. He was carrying a bomb but no other arms. Bill Doherty had a car at this time and they took him in this car to me at Curraghroe. I put him under guard in a vacant house there and from there he was taken to Madden's area at Ballagh. He was there for a couple of days and Doherty brought me up there and we took Dennehy to the Shannon. Peter Connolly, John Scally and I brought him out in a boat and tied to a stone we dumped him into the river. His body never floated and he was never heard of again.

As O/C. of the column I was at liberty to move anywhere

inside the brigade area. Communication with the brigade H.Q. was maintained by dispatch riders on cycles and we also had a boat available on Kilglass Lake. We also had a couple of lines of communication across the Shannon to the Longford side by boat. The stationmaster at Drumsna railway station was very helpful and always took and received dispatches for G.H.Q. Dublin for us.

The only attempt at making munitions by us was the making of and filling into shotgun cartridges of slugs, the making of concrete mines and some bombs of the cart box type. We were able to get a small supply of gelignite from the Co. Council quarries and G.H.Q. supplied us with some "war flour" - a very high explosive. The bombs contained four sticks of gelignite and a fuze which had to be lighted before the bomb was thrown. G.H.Q. also sent us some of their own pattern bombs which were based on the Mills hand grenade but were larger and heavier. These G.H.Q. bombs were unsatisfactory. A number of them were 'duds' and they had a bad splinter effect.

Every battalion had its own intelligence officer and intelligence sections, but really every man was an intelligence agent as were most of the people too. We had tapped the post office at *ELPHIN* and were able to get copies of the enemy's code messages out from there. Mick Deignan, who was the brigade adjutant, could decipher those messages. After the Truce we also succeeded in getting the post office in Strokestown tapped for this purpose also.

I joined the I.R.B. at Michael Green's of Kilglass. Michael Green was the Centre. I then formed a circle in Curraghroe in which we had five members, all Volunteers. We met regularly, about once per fortnight. All executions in the area were carried out by members of the I.R.B. and it served as a good stiffener for the Volunteer force, and its members were good safe contacts when the column was moving into an area.

In 1919 a boycott of the R.I.C. was instituted on the orders of our G.H.Q. Traders were ordered by us not to supply the R.I.C. with provisions or other requirements. This was an effort to force the members of the police to resign and, as a secondary object, to develop a void between the police and the people. The police had now to commandeer their wants but, of course, paying for them in the ordinary way. The effects of this boycott were a doubtful gain. While it did help to drive a wedge between the R.I.C. and the people, very few of them resigned as a result. Instead, it seemed to make them stubborn and arrogant and, in this way, I am afraid we antagonised some of them who would be good friends of ours. We forgot they were Irishmen, and there is an old saying that you can lead an Irishman, but you can't drive him.

Signed:

Martin Fallon

(Martin Fallon)

Date:

9, 3 55

Witness:

Matthew Barry Comd't

(Matthew Barry), Comd't.

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