

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1135

ROINN



COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1135

**Witness**

William McNamara,  
Corbally House,  
Quin,  
Ennis,  
Co. Clare.

**Identity.**

Member of Irish volunteers,  
Ennis, Co. Clare, 1916-1921.

**Subject.**

Irish volunteer activities,  
Ennis, Co. Clare, 1916-1921

**Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.**

Nil

File No. S. 2444

Form B.S.M. 2

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21  
BURO STAIRS MILITARY 1913-21  
No. W.S. 1,136

STATEMENT BY WILLIAM McNAMARA,

Corbally House, QUIN, CO. CLARE.

(formerly O/C. Ennis Company, and Quartermaster  
of the Mid Clare Brigade Column)

---

I, William McNamara, was born at 70 O'Connell Street, Ennis, Co. Clare, in the year 1892. I was working with my parents at their grocery and bar business when Paddy Brennan, Meelick, Co. Clare, came to stay in our house. He had been in the British Civil Service from which he either resigned or was dismissed because of his association with the Irish Volunteers movement. From our house he commenced his activities as a Volunteer organiser in Co. Clare, until he was arrested after Easter Week 1916.

I became a member of the Irish Volunteers before he was arrested, but apart from drilling, I was not actively concerned in any duty until near Xmas 1916 when, under the auspices of the Irish Volunteers, a National Aid Concert was held at the Town Hall, Ennis, to raise funds for the prisoners. The Hall was attacked by ex-British army men, their wives and some supporters of the Redmondite Party. A number of Volunteers, including myself, were on duty outside the building. The mob threw stones and bottles from adjacent lanes and houses until the R.I.C. came along and took up positions at each side of the Hall. It was then that all the damage was done as the attackers hid behind the R.I.C. and showered stones, bricks and bottles until early hours in the morning. The R.I.C. would not allow us to interfere so that the ex-British servicemen and their friends were free to do as they pleased. From that night onwards there were small clashes in the town of Ennis between the Volunteers and that element until the East Clare Election campaign in July 1917.

Colonel Paddy Brennan was then just out of prison. He soon reorganised the Volunteers and got them ready to provide

protection duty during the whole campaign. It was the most bitter election in which I took part, although I was through most of the by-elections in 1917 and in the General Election in 1918. In the East Clare constituency the Redmondite Party was composed of ex-British army men and the riff-raff of the towns, both men and women. They attacked anywhere they saw a Sinn Fein supporter, especially if he was wearing the Sinn Fein colours and if he happened to be alone. They were supplied with free drink by many of the publicans the majority of whom were hostile to Sinn Fein. At times they were like lunatics attacking with knives and heavy sticks. The Volunteers in Ennis were on duty night and day during the whole election and worked in squads of eight men under a squad commander. On a few occasions violent clashes occurred between themselves and their supporters of the Irish Party candidate, the Volunteers being equipped with short batons of hard timber with a strap on *to secure to the wrist.*

In some of the country areas there were numerous scuffles between the supporters of the rival candidates. I remember in particular one day when Paddy Brennan ordered eight of us to proceed with him on bikes to a remote place on the main road between Broadford and O'Callaghan's Mills. We made the journey under cover of darkness and took up positions without anyone in the area being aware of the fact. Each man was armed with a revolver and 12 rounds of ammunition and we were placed behind the road fence at intervals of about 300 yards apart. On the previous Sunday, Mr. de Valera and a carload of his supporters were fired at as they were travelling along this road and the car was riddled with bullets. Fortunately there were no casualties. Our purpose in lying in ambush was to prevent a repetition of this incident. Mr. de Valera and his party came along early that morning on his way to O'Callaghan's Mills and his journey was unmolested. His meeting that day in O'Callaghan's Mills was a very successful one. We followed Mr. de Valera into

O'Callaghan's Mills where one of our party hoisted the Tricolour on a pole opposite the R.I.C. Barracks. The sight of these colours to the police was like a red rag to a bull. On perceiving the flag the R.I.C. got a long staff with a burning rag on the end and placed it near the flag. The wind blew some of the ~~flames~~ <sup>burning flag</sup> on to a thatched house setting it on fire and burning it to the ground. Most of the local people were at the meeting which was a good distance away and there was thus no help available to subdue the fire. When the by-election was over Paddy Brennan started organising and training the Irish Volunteers in the district, holding two weekly parades in Ennis. He marched the company to the local fairgreen where we were drilled and trained by a few ex-British army men. Brennan's activities as a Volunteer leader quickly came under notice of the R.I.C. authorities who decided to arrest him. He received word from a friendly R.I.C. source of the intention of the authorities and before he again appeared on a Volunteer parade he selected 10 men from the Ennis Company who, as soon as he was arrested, would in their turn take charge of the parades. In a few days Brennan was arrested along with his two brothers, Michael and Austin, who were similarly engaged <sup>in other parts of the area.</sup> They were taken to Cork Prison whence Paddy managed to send out orders to the men in Ennis to carry on public drilling and, when arrested, to refuse to recognise the Court and, when sentenced, to go on hunger strike. After Paddy Brennan's arrest, James Madigan marched out the men and he was next arrested. After him came James Griffey, Francis Shinnors and myself. We were all arrested in turn, tried by ~~the~~ military court in Cork, and sentenced to two years each. Frank Shinnors and myself were tried after the others and in our case 'hard labour' was attached to the sentence. We were all sent to Mountjoy Prison in Dublin. Shinnors and myself were put into the hard labour wing.

On arriving there I remember we were taken to have a bath

and ordered to put our clothes outside the bathroom, but we refused, as we were 'tipped off' that the warders would take our clothes and leave us prison garb. In that way we went to the cells with our own clothes. Next day I was taken out for exercise in a large yard and put in amongst a bunch of criminal prisoners. I noticed a prisoner in civilian clothes walking on the outer ring and was told he was Thomas Ashe, but I could not get any word with him. Ashe was also on 'hard labour'. Of course, 'hard labour' made no difference to us as we declined to wear prison clothes or do any work except that we got no mattress for the first 14 days. There were eight or nine Irish Volunteers prisoners in Mountjoy before we arrived. They were nearly all from Galway and had been a long time there. They were wearing prison clothes and were treated as criminals. As such they were obliged to work in all parts of the prison. This fact turned out to be useful to Ashe, Shinnors and myself, as they were able to keep <sup>us</sup> in contact with our colleagues in the other wing who were not on 'hard labour'. Soon after our arrival, a prisoner who was taking around the breakfast to my cell slipped me a note. He was Joe Kelly from Ballaghaderreen, undergoing two years' hard labour. The note was from Paddy Brennan, my own Volunteer O/C. and it contained orders that I should ask to see the Prison Governor on the following Saturday morning and from him demand treatment as a prisoner of war. When Saturday came, every Irish Volunteer prisoner in Mountjoy was before the Governor making this demand and the poor man was in a rage. He ordered us back to our cells and also stopped all exercise. Then the fun started.

We broke the cell windows, furniture and everything we could lay hands on. The first move in reply by the Prison Authorities was that all prisoners detained for political offences were transferred into one Wing, C.I.18, and all convicts removed to other wings. This was really to our advantage and it

was then easier to arrange for concerted action. The smashing of furniture was followed by the breaking of our cell windows which, in my case at any rate, was later to cause me considerable discomfort when there was nothing to seal off the cold draughts while I was lying in my cell on hunger strike. Several warders who were rushed into our wing made an attempt to put us in irons but failed as they were resisted; we fought with legs of tables and stools. In fairness, I should say that only a few warders were anxious to fight as most of them were in sympathy with us.

In the course of a few days after this turmoil began we received orders to go on hunger strike. I think this was towards the end of September 1917 and about 37 or 38 prisoners were involved. Out of that number 17 were Claremen. Paddy Brennan was selected as our leader. I believe we were six or seven days without food or exercise when, one morning, three warders rushed into my cell and dragged me to the prison doctor's room where I was placed on an army chair. My legs and hands were tied to it and my head held back. The doctor commenced the "forcible feeding". Although I was very weak, I resisted but failed to prevent him from feeding me as he forced some kind of an instrument into my mouth, causing it to remain open. Next, he inserted the tube and fed me. I was taken back to my cell in a very exhausted condition. Each prisoner had to go through the same treatment. We got orders from our own leader to resist as best we could. I was fed twice per day and each time the warders had to carry me up to the chair where I continued to resist as best I could. I was fed through both the nose and the mouth. All told, I think I was forcibly fed thirteen times during the strike which lasted 14 or 15 days. I felt very weak the whole time, but as I had no mattress and had to lie down on the boards I was at a disadvantage as compared with the big majority of the others.

The cold weather and the absence of glass in the cell windows made the ordeal still more uncomfortable and exhausting.

As far as I remember, on the second Saturday night of the hunger strike the prison governor and doctor visited Paddy Brennan several times and, on the following day, the strike was called off. Our demands were granted. It was only then we heard Thomas Ashe had died and that Joe McDonagh and James Griffey of Ennis were in hospital in a very weak condition. All of us got medical treatment until we were restored to normal health after which we were treated as prisoners of war. Apparently this treatment was too expensive for John Bull's taste, as, when we were well and strong again, the prison was invaded suddenly one morning by R.I.C. and military who ordered us to pack up and get into waiting lorries and we were driven to Dundalk Jail. There an attempt was made to deprive us of prisoner of war treatment and no sooner had this started than we went on hunger strike again. About 60 or 70 other prisoners, mostly Dublin men arrested after Thomas Ashe's funeral, joined us at this stage.

The Governor in Dundalk, Mr. McHugh, was a Kerryman and a great friend of Austin Stack who was a prisoner with us. After four days of this strike two army doctors examined us night and morning and released every prisoner who was weak. I was 14 days on hunger strike in Dundalk and, by that time, all the prisoners were set at liberty except Austin Stack, Phil McMahon, Dublin, Sullivan and Murray from Cork, Sean Treacy, Tipperary, John Minihan, Corofin, Co. Clare, and myself. It was a Saturday night. We were sitting together at the only fire in the prison hall when Austin Stack suddenly decided to interview the Governor. He argued with him that we would never survive until the following Monday and that there would be no medical inspection in the meantime. The Governor rang up the Prison Board in Dublin and recommended our release which was approved. We were released

*under the "Cat + Mouse" Act*

late on that Saturday night, and went to Dublin. We were taken to Mahony's Hotel, Gardiner St. where Paddy Brennan met us and ordered us to take no solid food until allowed to do so by a doctor who came to look after us. I must confess, however, that, along with another Ennis man - Jack Madigan - I slipped out that night contrary to all the orders that had been given and went to visit people whom Madigan got to know during the few days he had been out of Dundalk Jail before me. We got a great reception and helped by several bottles of stout I felt none the worse of the hunger strike.

We stayed until morning and then returned to the hotel where we found great excitement. Some of the released prisoners were in a bad way. They had eaten ham sandwiches contrary to medical advice and were at death's door. Paddy Brennan had also missed myself and Madigan and gave us a terrible dressing down. However, in a matter of a few days, I was as well as ever and, along with the other Claremen who had been released, marched in a body with Mr. de Valera to Glasnevin cemetery where a wreath was placed on the grave of Thomas Ashe.

In the course of a few days all the Claremen travelled home. In Ennis to meet the train that night was a huge crowd to greet us and in that crowd I noticed several people who were our bitter opponents before we were arrested. In my opinion, Thomas Ashe's death on hunger strike did more to help the Sinn Fein cause than anything that had previously happened.

After a few weeks rest, all the released men were back in their places in the Volunteer movement. Paddy Brennan was made Brigade O/C. of the Clare Brigade. I was appointed Brigade O/C. of Communications and James Griffey was made O/C. 1st Battalion (Ennis) which he put on a sound organisational basis, while James Madigan was made captain of the Ennis company.

Madigan was a man who always wanted action and he was not long in charge of the Ennis company when he planned a raid on

the Inch R.I.C. Hut about three miles from Ennis. The garrison consisted of a sergeant and five constables. He selected twelve men including myself for the attack. Only four of us were armed as we had only the four revolvers at the disposal of our company and they were of an old pattern. It was the practice of the police in this station to send out a patrol between 10 and 11 o'clock at night. Eight men, only two of whom had guns, were detailed to hold the patrol up and take their guns. <sup>and</sup> ~~Const.~~ <sup>Captain</sup> Madigan and myself were to knock at the door of the hut / when it opened, hold up the sergeant and his sole companion. We had with us three men equipped with ropes to tie up the two policemen while we removed the arms and ammunition from the building. The attack took place on the night of 18th January 1918. We knocked on the door of the hut which was partly opened by one of the men inside. However, the door was secured to the jamb inside by a strong chain and this prevented us from bursting our way inside. The policeman inside the door, by putting his back to an interior wall, managed to force the door back against us, catching my hand and Madigan's ~~coat~~ <sup>boot</sup> between door and jamb. We tried to fire but, at first, the revolvers refused to work. Eventually we did succeed in letting off two shots which caused the policeman to release some of his weight against the door which then opened enough to enable us to free ourselves. We had no sooner managed to do so than the door was slammed against us and then locked and bolted.

The police then opened fire with carbines and we were obliged to retreat. The patrol heard the shooting in the distance as also did the party of Volunteers who were detailed to disarm them. Knowing that the element of surprise, on which they entirely depended, had now been lost, they did not wait for the patrol to come along but vacated their positions and moved back to Ennis where we all arrived safely and without incurring any suspicion. Not one of the Volunteers concerned was

arrested or interrogated by the police.

After this attack an order from Brigade H.Q. forbade all raids and attacks on the police until we were better organised and armed. The work of training <sup>the</sup> and Volunteers and improving the organisation was intensified. More advanced company drill, such as skirmishing and field drill, went on and in a few months the Ennis Company had made great strides in that direction.

I think it was in August 1917, that Mr. W.T. Cosgrave was elected as M.P. for Kilkenny city. A few days before the polling, myself and another Ennis Volunteer named Mick Meere set out from Ennis at 6 a.m. on our bikes and cycled to Kilkenny. We arrived at 8 p.m. that night. On reporting at election headquarters we got a great reception.

We helped in all kinds of election work until the election was over. Of course, the Sinn Fein candidate, Mr. Cosgrave, was elected. Meere and I went home by early train next morning and when we arrived in Ennis that evening the captain of the Ennis Volunteers, James Madigan and a few Volunteers accompanied us to my parents' yard to get ready a tar barrel in celebration of Mr. Cosgrave's victory. We had everything ready when a Volunteer arrived saying there were a number of R.I.C. men in front of our gate leading out into O'Connell St. The gate, a big timber one, prevented the police from seeing us. We sent off one man to notify as many Volunteers as he could to parade <sup>the Gaol Road.</sup> at ~~the Gaol Road.~~ Mounting the tar barrel on a frame we removed it over sheds at the back until we landed the whole contraption on the <sup>Gaol Road</sup> ~~gaol road~~ where the Volunteers were waiting for us. The tar barrel was then set alight and the Volunteers paraded through the principal streets. It took the R.I.C. some time before they learned that they had been outwitted, but everything passed off peacefully that night.

Some time before the Armagh election in the early Spring of 1918, Paddy Brennan, O/C. Clare Brigade, selected about

eighty men from all over the county to go to Armagh. I happened to be one of them. We were sent to Dundalk where we stayed the night. At dawn next morning we marched to Forkhill. When we arrived there we found supporters of the Irish Party candidate in great strength. They had been brought into the constituency from the other northern counties. They were armed with pikes, sticks and batons and had two bands with them. Twenty of our contingent, under James Madigan, Ennis, were detailed to do protection duty at the principal polling booth in Forkhill. Several times during the day our opponent's paraded past the booth with bands. They were very aggressive and at different times it looked like a clash with us was imminent. Each of our men was armed with a revolver and we all felt quietly confident that we could deal comfortably with any awkward situation which might arise.

During the day, Madigan, myself and two Dublin Volunteers were sent in a motor car to take to the booth a man who was a County Councillor and who had been badly beaten a few days before because of his Sinn Fein views. After he had recorded his vote we were escorting him home again in the car. As we approached a crossroads there was a big crowd assembled outside a publichouse. They at once recognised the man we were escorting and rushed towards the car in a very threatening manner. A few shots over their heads quickly caused them to scatter, which they did to such an extent that on our way back there was not a soul to be seen at the same publichouse.

About twelve months later, James Madigan was again a prisoner in Dundalk Jail and among his comrades were two Forkhill men who were among the crowd on whom we fired on the day in question. They had changed their opinions in the meantime. One of them confessed to Madigan that he was one of the three whom we had wounded. These shots, I believe, saved a lot of trouble later on because as the day wore on, the Irish Party

supporters, being under no discipline and having no officers, got very much under the influence of drink and were beginning to behave like madmen. Word got round among them about the shooting and also that the Claremen were all armed and would use their guns very quickly. Like the mob whom we had previously encountered, they soon began to melt away and when night fell not one of these imported gentlemen was to be seen in Forkhill. But on their way back to their homes that night - they travelled in long cars - they burned a number of ricks of flax belonging to supporters of the Sinn Fein candidate. On the morning after polling day we marched back again to Dundalk and there entrained for home.

In the General Election of 1918, about 60 Volunteers from Clare were sent into East Mayo to help secure the return of the Sinn Fein candidate, Mr. de Valera. His opponent was one of the leading lights of the Irish Party - John Dillon. I was in charge of twelve men doing duty in Charlestown. There was no trouble there.

In the winter months of 1918 a few of us in Ennis made a number of hand-grenades in my home in Ennis and also refilled a quantity of shotgun cartridges. The grenades were made from tin canisters filled with scrap metal and blasting powder which could be ignited by a hand lit fuse. One night, while four of us were so engaged, James Madigan, Michael Hehir, Michael Kennedy and myself, we were called to the kitchen for tea. My younger brother, Joe, and a pal of his named Gerald Griffin, both members of Fianna Éireann, got into the room where we had been working without being seen. They were smoking cigarettes which came in contact with the blasting powder we had left on a table. This set off a frightful explosion that scattered us around the kitchen along with the dining table and whatever delph was on it. We rushed into the room where the explosion occurred and found that the boys were blown into another room

along with the partition. Both of them were badly burned on <sup>the</sup> hands and face. Even though we were only about 400 yards from the military barracks the explosion was not heard.

Luckily I put away the hand grenades according as we had them made, otherwise the whole lot of us would have been killed. Griffey and my brother were in bed for six months and it took a few years before they got back the full use of their hands,

By the commencement of 1919, the majority of the men of military age in Co. Clare were in the ranks of the I.R.A. and companies then existed in almost every parish. With the growth of the movement my post as Brigade O/C. Communications became a very busy one. All dispatches to and from Brigade H.Q. had to be sent by hand. The enemy forces, especially the R.I.C. had become very active in watching out for dispatches and in trying to suppress the circulation of the official organ of the I.R.A. - An tOglach. People and houses were being searched day and night. It was my duty to counteract this type of activity. Through the railways between Brigade H.Q. and G.H.Q. was a direct line of communication. Each week I received a large number of copies of An tOglach which I had to divide and send to each battalion of brigade. I had dispatch posts from five to six miles apart and each post had their dispatch riders attacked <sup>at</sup> so they had only to travel to the next post. Each dispatch rider had a receipt book which he got signed when he delivered his message. Usually the dispatches were carried after working hours except in case of urgency when special arrangements had to be made to ensure quick delivery. Such urgent dispatches always bore three crosses on top right-hand corner of the envelope. Very few of our dispatches fell into enemy hands.

I think it was in the early part of 1919 that the enemy garrison in Ennis was reinforced by additional military forces. It became apparent to the local Volunteers that some of these

new troops had not much faith in the efforts of their Government to crush the movement for Irish Independence and that they might provide a means to acquire arms and ammunition. One evening, Paddy <sup>McNamara</sup> ~~McInerney~~, 1st Lieutenant in the Ennis I.R.A. Company, and myself met a young soldier. He offered to sell us a rifle. On the following morning at 6 o'clock the two of us met again at the back wall of the military barracks and collected the rifle. That night the soldier called at my house where I handed him the agreed price for the gun - £4 - which I must confess came out of my mother's till. Having failed in an effort to get us more rifles that soldier deserted a short time afterwards and got safely out of the country. I think he got back to Wales without being captured.

A few nights after, a Volunteer named Fenian Dinan, who was working in the barracks, called at my house with a British army corporal who said he had a rifle to sell. I agreed to take the rifle at £5. Dinan and I went to the back wall of the barracks that night where the rifle was hidden and took it away. Two days later, this soldier called on me again. I was in the bar at the time and he made arrangements to hand over four rifles at £5 each. He was one of four men who were guarding a store about a mile away from the barracks. It was agreed that <sup>and a few Volunteers</sup> I would <sup>at the store</sup> call about midnight, knock at the door, say 'orderly officer' when <sup>our confederate inside</sup> he would open the door. Of course, we would have to hold up the guard, then take away the rifles. It was part of the plan that he would have tea ready for the rest of the guard by the time of my arrival and as they would be partaking of the meal, he would be on guard, so everything would be easy. I got a motor car and a few Volunteers and was about to set off to keep the appointment when, about 9 p.m., Fenian Dinan called on me and told me that the Corporal was put under arrest and taken away to H.Q. It appeared himself and <sup>Dinan</sup> ~~Fenian~~ made several visits to a 'pub' during the evening and he got drunk and was reported.

I never saw the Corporal afterwards and never heard what became of him.

Early in 1919, the Clare Brigade was divided into three different brigades, East, Mid and West. Each brigade was directly responsible to General Headquarters. The former O/C. of the Clare Brigade resented this and, though he was to continue in his former rank in charge of the East Clare Brigade, he resigned as a protest. In conjunction with a few other prominent officers, he formed a unit known as the "Independent Brigade" which, of course, was not recognised by Headquarters.

Brennan, of course, was very well known throughout the county and, in certain areas, was extremely popular. It so happened that the O/C. of the newly-created Mid Clare Brigade was regarded by a good number of the men who had now to serve under him as being <sup>unavoidable</sup> ~~unsuitable~~ for the post. This feeling was particularly rife in the 1st and 2nd Battalions, as well as a good part of the 3rd Battalion, and for a few months the "Independent Brigade" had the allegiance of the majority of the Volunteers in these three ~~battalion~~ <sup>battalions</sup> areas. Gradually, however, they changed their views and, by the end of May or June 1919, outside the Kilmaley area, practically all these dissentients - myself included - severed their connection with this splinter organisation and became members of the official Mid Clare Brigade.

Actually I must <sup>not have long</sup> ~~have~~ been a member of the "Independent Brigade" <sup>my long</sup> because, in March 1919, Joe Barrett, then on the staff of the Mid Clare Brigade, sent myself and another Ennis man, Dan <sup>McNamara</sup> ~~MacInerney~~, to Lahinch where we reported to Patrick Lehane who was in his own home at the time along with five or six others, all wanted men. It appears Joe Barrett had got information from a railway man in Ennis that four soldiers were guarding a box of rifles and ammunition.

This was the message which we had been instructed to convey to Lehane, then one of the officers of the 4th Battalion. He arranged that the train be held up outside Lahinch, but after a thorough search in which I took part, we found, not the rifles and ammunition, but a wagon full of officers' kits. We seized all this material; the boots, leggings and shirts came in very useful to the men in the area who were 'on the run' at the time. McInerney and myself, however, were two very disappointed men when we had to cycle back to Ennis - 17 or 18 miles - when the capture did not turn out to be what we expected. Two unarmed officers' orderlies who were on the train were not interfered with.

During the remainder of 1919 there was not any military activity by the I.R.A. in the Ennis district. In fact, it was not until the following Spring that things started to brighten up a bit when an attack was made on Constable <sup>SWANTON</sup> ~~Stanton~~. This man was one of two detectives stationed in Ennis. They were most zealous in trying to track down any type of movement on the part of the I.R.A. Orders were issued to shoot them. Liam Stack, a native of Listowel, and then employed as a chemist's assistant in Ennis, Mick Foley, Peter D'Loughlin, Tom Keane and myself were selected for the job which was planned to take place as the detectives would be returning from the railway station. We were armed with revolvers and had chosen our position at the cross-road ~~where the Gaol Road meets the Clon Road~~ <sup>opposite the entrance to the Shirlan Brothers School</sup>. As we were waiting for our quarry, Keane, acting as scout, reported to us that only Detective Swanton was coming. Swanton had noticed Keane on his trail and was on the alert when he saw us standing at the cross-roads and he began to run. We opened fire after him and the next thing we saw was Swanton falling on the road. After falling he never made a move and, thinking he was dead, we moved off. About two hours after this attack I was arrested in my own home by the R.I.C. Tom Keane was also arrested and Jim Griffey too,

although he was not in the affair at all. We were first taken to Ennis Police Barracks and conveyed to Limerick Jail.

~~It turned out that Swanton was not hit at all but, a few days after, he was badly wounded in a further attack which was made on him. This occurred about 24th April 1920.~~  
*Swanton was not badly wounded and the attack took place on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920.*

We were held in Limerick Prison awaiting trial for two months. There were about 30 prisoners with us some of whom had been in for over six months without any charge having been preferred against them. Conditions generally were not bad and we were allowed to exercise together every day in a large yard.

Eventually we decided to go on hunger strike and sent an ultimatum to the Governor of the prison that unless we were tried or released within seven days the hunger strike would start. On the termination of the seven days nothing had happened, *and the "Hunger Strike" started.* After four days, Thomas Keane, who was very young and delicate, was in a bad way, as also was Jimmy Griffey.

The latter had his health badly affected by the big hunger strike in Mountjoy in 1917 and really was not physically fit enough to participate in the second one. The Prison Governor, Mr. Faulkner, was a nice man and was more or less in sympathy with us. He visited our cells several times night and day, especially Keane's whose health was very much worrying the prison doctor. On the seventh day of the strike, all the men on hunger strike were released. After a few days of home treatment I had fully recovered and reported fit for further I.R.A. duty. *By a coincidence, on the day of our release from Limerick Jail, Constable Swanton passed us on a stretcher at the railway station.*

I was out of jail three or four weeks when a Fianna boy, whose name I don't remember, called at my home to tell me that there were two British soldiers in a field at the back of St. Flannan's College and they had two rifles to sell. I went down to them and bought the two rifles with 100 rounds of rifle ammunition for £8. They were deserting and going back to Scotland. I got them two old civilian suits and caps, socks

and boots. They belonged to a cavalry regiment and gave me their boots, leggings and breeches which I sent out to the country to men on the run and who were delighted to get them..

There was a big railway strike on at this time but a bus was running which went direct to Dublin. Michael Kennedy and myself got the two deserters on this bus but, apparently, they changed their mind before they got very far as, a few nights later, while I was in the bar having a drink with Michael Kennedy, the two of them came in accompanied by four or five other soldiers. They at once recognised us and introduced us to their pals who, they said, were also anxious to desert. As they were in a hurry to get back to barracks we arranged to meet them again.

These soldiers were nearly all Scotsmen and the cavalry regiment to which they belonged was used as a 'flying column' moving through the country a good deal. It never remained long in the same locality. They were a decent body of men and the vast majority of them did not relish the particular class of soldiering at which they were employed in Ireland. On 'pay nights', when a good number of them got a bit tipsy, they could be heard in the bus in Ennis singing Irish rebel and Sinn Fein songs.

The detachment consisted of about 100 men and while in Ennis it was quartered in the old college. Though I did not make contact again with any of them, other members of the Ennis I.R.A. did and plans were made, with the connivance of some of the soldiers, to capture the old college with all the arms and ammunition. However, before the plans could be put into operation the detachment was transferred elsewhere. Previous to the transfer of the two soldiers from whom I had obtained the rifles deserted again and it was only then that the rifles were discovered to be missing by the commanding officer. This officer, Colonel Seymour, was an Englishman. He had a violent dislike for the Irish and consequently the I.R.A., a body which he held in

great contempt. In the hotels and bars which he frequented during his stay in Ennis, he boasted a good deal about what he would do with any Sinn Feiners who crossed his path and also made a lot of noise about the fact that since his coming to soldier in Ireland he never lost a horse or a man. On learning of the loss of the two rifles he became infuriated. He posted notices all over the town offering a reward for information that would lead to the recovery of the guns. I decided to play a prank on him. Jack D'Arcy, Michael Kennedy and myself each wrote a letter addressed to him in which the same story was related. The story described how while in a certain pub a conversation was overheard between a cavalry soldier and a Sinn Feiner regarding the sale of rifles and ammunition and that the guns and bullets were to be left by the soldier in either of one of two other shops the owners of which were said by the Sinn Feiner to be secret supporters of Sinn Fein. The names of ex-British soldiers known to be hostile to the I.R.A. were forged to these letters and the three shopkeepers to whom the letters referred were pronounced pro-Britishers, doing a good trade with the members of the enemy garrison.

In the course of a day or two after posting the letters the shops were raided by a party of military under the personal command of Colonel Seymour himself. In the thorough search which was made of each of the three shops everything was tossed upside down by the soldiers. The owners, of course, were horrified and indignant that such treatment should be meted out to them, such good loyalists and enemies of Sinn Fein. Their feelings were more outraged when the gallant colonel regarded their protests as sheer pretence and said they were not going to bluff him, as he was aware what they really were. The raids were the subject of many a good <sup>joke</sup> ~~talk~~ around Ennis for a long while after.

My next venture in trafficking in arms landed me back in jail again. It was soon after Colonel Seymour's famous raids.

A Volunteer named James Corry brought me a message that the military sergeant in charge of the guard at the railway station was anxious to meet a Sinn Feiner willing to buy rifles. This man's name was Connolly and he was a native of Limerick city. I met him and we arranged terms. I was to buy four rifles at £4 each; the guns would be thrown over the back wall of the barracks at night and collected by me, and Connolly would call to my place for the money.

Selecting three other Volunteers to go with me to collect the rifles on the appointed night, we were waiting for the hour to come to proceed to the rear of the barracks when another military sergeant, Rynne by name, met us. He was friendly towards the I.R.A. He told us that he had been searching for us all over the town to warn us against attempting to get the rifles, and then revealed that earlier in the day Connolly had been caught trying to get some army blankets out of barracks. He was placed under arrest and ~~under~~<sup>on</sup> interrogation had disclosed all about the arrangement which he had made with me to sell four rifles. As a result of this the military authorities had placed an officer and ten men in the vicinity of the spot where Connolly was to throw the rifles over the barrack wall to arrest me when I came along. Naturally we did not keep the appointment but decided to go home. On the way we were intercepted by a military patrol and James Corry and myself were taken into custody and sent on next day to Limerick Jail.

Thanks to Sergeant Rynne's warning the only evidence which the authorities had against myself and Corry was Sergeant Connolly's statement that I had arranged with him to buy rifles and, apparently, they were not too sanguine about the chances of securing a conviction even before a military court. We were in Limerick Jail for two months awaiting trial. There were a number of other I.R.A. prisoners there too who were in for a good while without being charged. Through some source, word

came to the prisoners that the British Government had decided that any person known to be prominent in the I.R.A. or Sinn Fein Movement was to be arrested and detained for three months in an ordinary prison and, at the end of that period, transferred to an internment camp. Ten or twelve of the prisoners in Limerick, including Corry and me, decided to resort to the hunger strike weapon to back up a demand for immediate trial or release. We had again to deal with the same old Governor and the strike lasted only six days when we were set at liberty.

As I was leaving the prison on that occasion, my discharge papers were handed to me by the same military officer who performed a similar function when I was being released after the previous hunger strike. He recognised me and said: "The next time we'll get you or you'll not see a prison". He was furious at the thought of having to set us free, and if he had his way we would have died on the hunger strike rather than let us out. In fact, I was only a short time at home when a big hunger strike began among the I.R.A. prisoners in Cork Jail which finally ended in the death of ~~the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence McSwiney,~~ ~~and~~ Michael Fitzgerald.

Soon after coming out of jail this time, I was told by Joe Barrett, then adjutant of the Mid-Clare Brigade, that the brigade staff had decided to disarm the military guard of a corporal and six men which passed my house each evening coming from guard duty at the Butter Market to the military barracks. He asked me to make a careful note of the distance between each pair of soldiers. I did this on a number of evenings and duly reported the result of my observations to him. He had selected a picked group of men for the disarming operation, all of whom were from the <sup>country</sup> ~~centre~~ districts around Ennis and he did not want to bring any of the townsmen into it for fear they might be recognised.

The evening selected for the raid was the eve of a horse

fair in Spencilhill, 24th June 1920, an occasion when there was usually a large crowd in Ennis especially along O'Connell St. where I lived. As the guard came along, four or five Volunteers had taken up a position where it was estimated each pair of soldiers - they were well spaced out - would be when the prearranged signal - a whistle blast - was given. Everything went like clockwork and in a couple of seconds the guard was disarmed. I was standing at the gate leading from O'Connell St. into the yard of my house when some of the attackers dragged in a young soldier. Like all the others, he was very young and very frightened. He was not able to rid himself of his equipment but someone produced a knife and cut it off. The arms, seven rifles and equipment, were deposited in a waiting motor car and driven out to the brigade dump which was then in the Darragh district.

After the Rineen ambush between Lahinch and Miltown Malbay, which was carried out by men from 4th Battalion, Mid Clare Brigade, savage reprisals were carried out by the British forces in Ennistymon, Lahinch and Miltown Malbay. Joe Barrett got information that it was the enemy's intention to extend the reprisals as far as Ennis where four or five houses were to be burned during the course of the night. Barrett and I selected twelve Ennis Volunteers - they were all ex-British soldiers who had only recently joined the I.R.A. - and took up positions adjacent to the houses which we heard were to be destroyed. Each man was armed with a service rifle and 50 rounds of ammunition and orders were given that as soon as the enemy would be about to start his incendiary operations we would open fire. After waiting until morning the enemy did not turn up, nor did he carry out any reprisals in Ennis after the Rineen affair.

The rifles which we had on the night we were expecting the reprisals in Ennis were brought in from the brigade dump by

Michael Barrett, Vice O/C. 2nd Battalion. He conveyed them to my yard in a horse and cart on which the rifles were covered with hay. They were temporarily hidden in a loft over the garage in the yard. Next day, Jack Hourigan, an ex-soldier, supervised the cleaning of the guns. That night I got four tall Volunteers from the Ennis company who were wearing overcoats. Each man put a rifle inside the lining of the coat and then, under a covering party of myself and two other men armed with the revolvers, the rifles were all transferred to a ~~chest~~ shed in the convent grounds. The houses we expected to be burned were either adjacent to the convent or in that quarter of the town and there was less trouble and risk in getting the guns for the men who had been selected to intercept the enemy if he came along to carry out the reprisals. In the morning the guns were left back again in the convent shed. In fact, they remained there for some time, because ~~it was~~ some weeks later when an ambush planned on the Tulla road at a place called Finana, two miles from Ennis, took place, when the rifles for that job were taken from the convent to Barron's house outside the town on the night before the ambush was due to take place.

This ambush was intended for a military lorry which travelled between Tulla and Ennis. I was in charge and I had ten men with me. We had brought the arms from Barron's to the ambush positions in a donkey and cart and it was our intention to use the cart in blocking the road so as to bring the lorry to a halt. As the lorry might travel either way we had two scouts posted on the road, one at each side of the position. The scouts had to pretend that they were road workers but, as soon as the vehicle passed, the scout was to raise his shovel to his shoulder to indicate that it was an enemy lorry. We remained all day in the position, but no lorry put in an appearance. That evening all the guns were handed over to Jack Hassett, then 1st Lieutenant of the local company and the man

who was in charge of the dump for the 1st Battalion. I cannot remember the date on which this ambush was arranged, but it was only a short time before the attack on Ruan R.I.C. Barracks. Ruan is a small village about six miles from Ennis on the road to Corofin and on the railway line to West Clare. It was a commanding position in the country between Ennis and the Galway border and was regarded as being of such importance by the R.I.C. that after the general evacuation of the smaller R.I.C. stations in March 1920, the post there was strengthened from a sergeant and four or five men to two sergeants and 12 or 13 men.

Among the R.I.C. stationed in Ruan at the time of the attack was a Constable Bill Carroll, a Roscommon man. He had his mind made up to leave the force as his sympathies were with the I.R.A. He was in contact with some of the I.R.A. leaders, notably Sean Casey, O/C. 3rd Battalion, and in conjunction with them planned details of the raid. For some days before the raid I was busy making arrangements for the transfer of rifles, revolvers and ammunition from the Ennis district to Barefield, where the men from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalion paraded the night before the operation. The men were divided into sections for different jobs. A number of men with rifles were posted at different points on the roads leading to Ruan and, as far as I can remember, about 20 men armed with revolvers were chosen to enter the barracks. Those armed with revolvers were divided into two groups of ten men in each section, a section to enter each of the two rooms in which the police were sleeping. I was in one of these sections.

Before arriving at the village of Ruan from Barefield we halted, perhaps a half a mile away, the men selected to go into the barracks, took off our boots and then marched the remainder of the journey in our stockinged feet. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning of 14th October 1920. We waited behind a wall at

the side of the barracks until Constable Carroll, who was on duty as an orderly, gave the signal to enter. In less time than it takes to tell, we were in the upstairs rooms where the police were fast asleep. In the room in which I was one of the police - Constable Lockneed - jumped out of bed on being awakened and appeared to be making an attempt to get his rifle from the rack over his bed when a shot rang out which mortally wounded him. Another policeman was slightly wounded in the leg. In the other room Sergeant McCarthy, who was in charge of the garrison, also made an effort to fight, but he was deprived of his revolver before being able to use it. The rest of the police submitted tamely and the barracks was ours in a matter of minutes.

Constable Lockneed, a big heavy man, was dead before we were able to remove him to the yard and we dressed the wound of the constable who had been shot in the leg. All the arms, ammunition and equipment of the police was seized and the building was then set on fire. I cannot give particulars of the booty but, in addition to 14 or 15 rifles and revolvers, we captured a large quantity of ammunition and a number of boxes of Mills bombs.

Most of the R.I.C. did not appear to be unduly upset over the fate that had befallen them, but Sergeant McCarthy was very annoyed and refused to give an undertaking that there would be no reprisals. To annoy him all the more he was made fall in with the other survivors of the garrison and submit to being drilled up and down the village by Ignatius O'Neill. As it happened, there were no reprisals over the attack and all the men involved got safely back to their homes. The booty was conveyed to Barefield.

After the capture of Ruan Barracks the enemy raided my home for me several times and also raided for Jim Corry and Sean Con O'Halloran of the Ennis Company. The three of us went on the run after that.

I was only about a week or a fortnight <sup>on the run</sup> when along with five

other men from the Mid Clare Brigade all armed with revolvers we were instructed to report to Austin Brennan, the O/C. of the East Clare Brigade. We cycled to Cratloe, 6 or 7 miles from Limerick and there met himself and half a dozen Volunteers from his own unit. Under his command we all cycled on to Castleconnell where Sean Carroll of the Mid Limerick Brigade was waiting to ferry us across the Shannon in a boat to Co. Limerick. It was well after dark when we reached Limerick and the country was strange to me. I had only left the boat and was making for what I took to be a road when I next found myself up to my neck in a deep stream which flowed into the Shannon. My friend, Con O'Halloran, came quickly to my rescue and pulled me to safety. I was not feeling very happy during the course of the next part of the journey when I had to cycle to Caherconlish, a distance of 12 or 13 miles. We halted for a rest at Caherconlish, being accommodated in a big hayloft. I stripped to the skin and nestled nice and comfortably in the hay while someone removed my clothes and got them dried. Dick O'Connell of the Mid Limerick Brigade called on us on the following morning and from him I learned the purpose for which we had come to Limerick. He said that a number of enemy Intelligence officers known to G.H.Q. as members of the "Murder Gang", which had been operating around Dublin for some time previously, were coming by train to Limerick and that they were to be met and shot at Killonan railway station. He stated too that our contingent from Clare would be reinforced by men from his own Brigade.

We remained in Caherconlish for four or five days when word came that the operation was off. We were told at the time that the men for whom we had been waiting had come as far as Kingsbridge Station in Dublin when they were suddenly recalled. Instead of coming on to Limerick, the British authorities gave them instructions to find billets in hotels and boarding

houses in Dublin and I believe they were the British officers who were wiped out by the Dublin I.R.A. men in the big attack which preceded Bloody Sunday when a number of people were killed and wounded in Croke Park.

On our return journey from Limerick, we had a very narrow escape indeed. All the Claremen were cycling along the main Ennis-Limerick road in pairs about 20 yards apart. Sean O'Halloran, Scariff, had been sent on in front of the party to scout the road. It was about 9 or 10 o'clock at night. Con O'Halloran, Scariff, and myself were in front and in the vicinity of Cratloe we were ordered to halt. At first we thought it might be I.R.A. scouts along the road, but were not long left in doubt, as a burst of fire across the road quickly made us realise that we had run right into the enemy who were lying in ambush. The fire was heavy and concentrated and we were both knocked off our bikes. I managed to escape with an injured knee, probably caused in my fall from the bike. Fortunately the fence on the left hand side of the road was very low and the field inside it was a few feet below the level of the road. I clambered into the field and, after a while, made contact with Con O'Halloran and another of the Mid Clare crowd, Jack Hassett. The country in which we were was strange to us. We called into a number of houses, all of which were deserted. We then realised that something was after happening which caused the owners to leave their homes. After wandering about for a couple of hours we found a large hayshed with several local people congregated inside. From them we learned that a day or two previously a British military plane had made a forced landing in the vicinity of the place where we had been fired at and that a guard which had been placed over the plane was attacked by a few of the local Volunteers who inflicted a number of casualties on the enemy. By way of revenge, the military in the course of raids following the attacks assaulted the civilian population indiscriminately with the result that the people fled from their homes in terror.

Sean O'Halloran, the scout, cycled right into the ambushing party which consisted of military. He was fired on at point blank range and badly wounded. When the soldiers heard us coming they left him and jumped inside the road fence. Thinking that he was dead they left him lying on the roadside but he recovered consciousness, crawled along the road to a cottage where his wounds were dressed and from whence he was shifted later on by some local Volunteers to a place of safety. He made a rapid recovery and was on active service again in a couple of months.

Before morning the remainder of the Mid Clare men who had made the trip to Limerick arrived in the hayshed and we decided to go back to our own brigade area. Owing to military activity and the loss of our bikes in the previous night's surprise attack on us, the journey had to be made across country and covered a total of about 30 miles in a stormy and rainy day. Con O'Halloran, Jack Hassett and myself were tired and sore men when we reached Spencilhill. Owing to the injury to my knee, rendered worse by the long march, I was obliged to remain in bed for 10 or 12 days, but, thanks to the good treatment I received from the Misses McInerney (two), in whose house I sheltered, I was back on duty at the end of that time as fit as a fiddle.

On my recovery from this spell of inactivity, I would say it was then well out in November 1920, and the Auxiliaries were only after coming to Killaloe, I joined a big I.R.A. assembly which had been mobilised in Spencilhill to attack a convoy of Auxiliaries that was expected to travel from Killaloe via Tulla to Ennis. I would say that, all told, there were about sixty men armed with rifles and shotguns belonging to the Mid Clare Brigade brought together on this occasion. We were to be reinforced by a party from the East Clare Brigade. During the day a dispatch arrived from Michael Brennan of the latter unit

notifying us that the Auxiliaries had travelled by another road, through Newmarket-on-Fergus, so the ambush party were ordered to disperse.

It was the same day, I believe, that Joe Barrett, brigade adjutant, ordered me to notify all the men from the 1st Battalion who were on the run to report on the following Saturday night at Kearney's Castle at 10 o'clock. Only three men did so - Jack Hassett, <sup>James</sup>~~Peter~~ Corry and myself. My friend, Con O'Halloran, had been arrested during the week and he was thus prevented from being present, but I may say that there was a number of others, maybe 9 or 10, who stayed away that had no genuine reason for doing so. Some men from the 2nd Battalion also attended. The Brigade O/C., Frank Barrett, announced that night to those assembled that he was starting a brigade flying column to be composed of men on the run. He explained that each man would be armed with a rifle and issued with <sup>50</sup>~~100~~ rounds of ammunition and that the entire column would remain together day and night. He also announced that the column O/C. would be his brother, Joe, then brigade adjutant; Vice O/C. Peadar O'Loughlin, also Vice O/C. of the brigade, and that Sean Casey and myself were to be column adjutant and quartermaster respectively. The final statement made that night by the Brigade O/C. was that we were all to meet on that night week at Mrs. Gibson's of Inch.

On the following Saturday night Joe Barrett, Sean Casey and myself travelled from Spencilhill to Mrs. Gibson's place. On the following day Bernard Barrett, Patrick Costelloe (Pappy), O/C. 2nd Battalion, and Martin Slattery joined us and on Sunday night Jack Hassett arrived with his own rifle and managed to be accepted after some persuasion. We waited until next day, thinking other "wanted men" might arrive, but, in disgust, we had to set off from Inch with a total of seven men, which might have been twice or three times that number. Young Corry of Ennis, who had been with me through the last hunger strike in Limerick Jail, tried hard to come but, on account of his youth,

he was not allowed. Our destination, after leaving Inch, was Kilfenora in North Clare, where it was arranged we would join the men from the 4th and 5th Battalions who had been chosen to represent their units in the flying column.

At Kilfenora there were over 70 men gathered, all vying with one another to be taken into the column. Eventually the selections were made and the total strength of the column was, I think, 60 men divided into four sections of 15 men. Each man got a rifle and 50 rounds of .303 ammunition. For the first week the men were billeted in the village of Kilfenora where we attended a Mission that happened to be in progress at the time. The following week the whole column marched out to Lickeen, three miles from Kilfenora, and in that district the men were accommodated among the houses in the townlands of Lickeen and Tullaha. All the time was taken up with drilling and tactical manoeuvres while each night positions were taken up for a few hours along different roads along which the enemy might be expected to travel. I was fairly busy in my job as quartermaster as I had got orders to see that each man got a daily ration of cigarettes and tobacco and that he was properly looked after in the way of boots, socks and clothes. I arranged to get whatever supplies of these goods that were required from the village of Kilfenora, while food was given free by the people with whom the column stayed. During the second week we were joined by two men who, until then, had been members of the 'Independent Brigade' - John Minihan and Jimmy Kierse of Corofin; they had brought their own rifles and ammunition.

I would say that it was during the second week of our stay in Lickeen when, about half a dozen members of the column, including the officers and a few of the most experienced men, examined the road between Ennistymon and Inagh with a view to selecting a position to attack a convoy of two or three lorries which then frequently travelled between Ennistymon and Ennis.

In that stretch of road there were very suitable places for the purpose, but finally it was decided to bring off the attack at Monreal just three miles from Ennistymon. One evening, a few days prior to the date fixed for the ambush, as we were looking over the chosen position, three lorries of R.I.C. and Black and Tans, which were being driven at rapid speed, ran into us as we were crossing the road and the enemy opened fire. However we got away under cover of fences and got back to Lickeen safely.

On the morning of the ambush the column moved out of Lickeen a few hours before dawn and marched across country to Monreal. It was bitterly cold, the ground being heavily coated with white frost. It was 18th December 1920. The column was divided into two platoons - No. 1 Platoon, under the column commander, took up positions on the left hand side of the road running into Ennistymon, while No. 2 Platoon was posted on the other side of the road. I can only speak of what occurred in the position held by No. 1 Platoon to which I was attached, as at no part of the engagement did we make contact with the other platoon, which incidentally occupied much the better position.

I will say here that the position as a whole was a bad one and suitable only for engaging two lorries. The ground occupied by No. 1 Platoon sloped towards the Cullinagh river which ran roughly parallel to the road and a distance of about 300 or 350 yards. The country between the road and the river afforded very little cover, an occasional hollow in the ground, a rock or a clump of heather. Of course, the positions behind which we sheltered before the engagement opened were low stone pieces of broken fences, the only fences between the road and the river. About 300 yards from the point where the first lorry came under fire after coming round a bend on the road from Ennis was a crossroads from which a byroad ran across Moynananagh Bridge across the river to our rear.

No. 1 Platoon was divided into two sections which I shall refer to as "A" and "B". Section "A" in which I was had as its leader Peadar O'Loughlin, while Section "B" was under the direct control of the column commander. Section "A" was only a few yards from the road and were down in a hollow which prevented us from seeing the lorries until they actually passed above us on the road, and then they remained in view while, ~~if~~ moving for a distance of only 100 yards where the road disappeared round a bend before it ran straight to the crossroads. Section "B" was further back from the main road, 100 yards or so, and sheltered behind the low stone walls to which I have already referred. It was to our right on the Ennis side. The men in that section were on the higher ground and, had the lorries covered once they came round the bend from Ennistymon onwards for about 200 yards.

The lorries came along about nine in the morning. There were three vehicles containing a mixed force of R.I.C., Black and Tans and soldiers. As they approached us one of the men in our section accidentally discharged a shot which caused the first lorry to put on speed towards the crossroads. We fired on it while it remained in view. The other two lorries pulled up, one of them directly under the position held by No. 2 Platoon, while the next one stopped 40 or 50 yards behind. Both were out of view of our section and we were useless, and, as Section "B" had retreated, we also moved off towards the river. We almost reached the river unobserved, some of the men had actually got across it when we came under a sudden burst of machine gunfire. This fire came from the survivors of the first lorry who had brought the machine gun into action from behind a wall near the crossroads. Paddy O'Loughlin, a wound in the arm; Bill Carroll, the ex-R.I.C. man who had helped us to capture Ruan Barracks, a leg wounded, and myself two scalp wounds and one over the right eye, were hit by the opening hail of bullets

from this machine gun. I managed to get into the river, but as the banks were very low I had to crawl along the bed until I reached a double bank wall which met the river at right angles and with a few other men <sup>who joined me at this point we began</sup> ~~I was able~~ to return the fire. One <sup>Section "A"</sup> by one nearly all the men who formed No. 1 Platoon got behind the wall, <sup>and from there we made our way under cover of the wall and bushes until we joined Section "B" about 80 or 90 yards up from the river.</sup>

For a time, Jack Hassett and Jimmy Kierse were missing, but ultimately they joined us and, availing of cover which the land provided on the other side of the river, the whole platoon withdrew. We moved across the country until we reached Slieve Bawn near Inagh where we billeted. Those of us who had been wounded had lost a lot of blood with the result that our clothes were covered with it. After being put to bed, our clothes were removed and washed by the womenfolk of the houses in which we were accommodated. Dr. Hillary, <sup>Milltown Malbay,</sup> at great risk and after a journey through the country, reached us during the night and attended to the wounded. I received six stitches over the eye. In addition to those I have already named, Jack Hassett was also wounded. He was the worst case, having received a number of bullets in both legs.

We heard nothing from No. 2 Platoon until next day. I think they got away lighter than we did and had only two men wounded.

I am not able to say what losses were inflicted on the enemy. Certainly we captured nothing from him in the way of arms, while we lost one rifle. Paddy O'Loughlin dropped his when he was hit in the arm and left it behind.

Joe Barrett, the column commander, stayed with me in Slieve Bawn for five or six days after which I was well enough to go with him to Kilmaley, where I rested for five or <sup>more</sup> six days / and then went on to John Joe McInerney's, Knockanoura, Carahan, and remained about his place until I was arrested in February 1921. Dr. Brennan of Quin came regularly to dress my wounds until they were fully healed.

I was still under medical treatment and in fact it was only

a fortnight or so after Monreal when the O/C. 1st Battalion received word to attend a meeting at Brigade H.Q. in Darragh, 10 or 12 miles from Carahan. He was sick at the time, so I decided to deputise for him, taking young Corry from Ennis with me. After the meeting I was coming back to Carahan accompanied by Corry and Martin Slattery. We were crossing the main road between Ennis and Clarecastle when we walked right into a foot patrol of eight R.I.C. men. They were walking along the footpath and were in pairs about 50 yards apart. The leading policemen were only a few yards away as we were crossing. One of them had been stationed in Ennis for a long time and knew Corry and myself very well, but he took no notice of us. We continued on our way and got into a laneway on the other side of the road where we took cover and let the patrol get well out of sight. Only two of us were armed with revolvers for which we had only six rounds per man.

The military barracks was only half a mile away and to get past it meant <sup>crossing</sup> a wide open plain, so, instead of going in the direction we intended, we retraced our steps the other way. We had not gone far when three lorries of soldiers pulled up at the spot where we had crossed the road and began a search for miles around the country that we had been seen heading for. However, we managed to elude them and, by nightfall, I had arrived safely back in Carahan.

Up to January 1921, there were a lot of guns held by the company officers in the 1st Battalion. In that month I received orders from Brigade H.Q. to collect these guns and to keep them in a battalion dump. Assisted by Jim Corry and John McMahon, Q.M. Clooney Company, I gathered up a number of rifles, revolvers and a quantity of ammunition. McMahon, who was a handy fellow, constructed a dump in a sand pit on his own farm which he lined with timber and this was afterwards used for keeping the battalion stores.

It was, I believe, about the first week in January 1921, on orders from Brigade H.Q., six or seven men from Ennis, including Jim Corry and Jack D'Arcy, reported with me at Gibson's Inch. Altogether, about 60 men from all over the Mid Clare Brigade area had assembled there and, to the best of my recollection, almost every man had a rifle. The Brigade O/C., Frank Barrett, was in charge. He marched us to Caherea, eight miles from Ennis on the road between that town and Kilrush. It was intended to attack an enemy convoy of three or four lorries which travelled a few times a week between these two places. Three sections, each containing ten men, with Joe Barrett, Sean Casey and myself as section commanders, were placed in three separate positions, while the rest of the party, about 30 strong, took up another position under the command of Frank Barrett himself. Except Joe Barrett's section, all the rest were on the same side of the road, the left hand side facing Ennis.

The scene of this attack was on both sides of Caherea National School. On the Ennis side of the school the road takes a sharp bend at a distance of about 250 yards away. On the Kilrush side of the school there is another bend on the road and it was at this point on the road that my section was stationed just inside the road fence which was so low that we had to build a bit of a single stone wall for cover. About 500 yards to the left of my section Casey's men occupied position on rising ground 60 yards from the road and almost directly opposite him on the other side of the road Joe Barrett's section was placed about 100 yards from the road. The main body were lined along a byroad which ran into the hilly country above Caherea. Their positions overlooked the main road and gave a field of fire along it for about a quarter of a mile.

Positions were occupied about 9 o'clock in the morning and nothing came along all day. It was coming on nightfall when it was decided to withdraw. The men were leaving their positions

when four or five lorries of enemy troops came out from Ennis. Some of our scouts were seen by them running towards where Joe Barrett's men were. The enemy pulled up and at once engaged them. I had no idea of what was happening as the bends on the road intruded on my view. The next thing I noticed the main body at our rere, so I ordered my section to follow suit. We overtook the main body on top of a hill where a halt was made in the hope that the enemy might come towards us. After remaining there for perhaps an hour the shooting had ceased and we learned that the enemy had gone back to Ennis. We also withdrew and went across the country to Kilmaley where we were disbanded. Corry and I returned that night to Carahan. Joe Barrett took his section out of the area safely, while Casey's section also withdrew without being noticed at all by the enemy.

I left my rifle after me in Brigade H.Q. in Darragh as I wanted to pay a visit to my mother at home in Ennis. That day on which the ambush took place, my sister, Mrs. Paddy Brennan, was buried in the town. I had not been at the wake and was anxious to see my mother as soon as I could. However, the visit did not materialise as I was warned that my home was being kept under close watch by the enemy, and that it would be most unwise to attempt to call there.

Perhaps I should explain here that the Brigade O/C. tried to dissuade me from participating in the Caherea ambush at all. He objected on the grounds that I had not recovered from the wounds received in Monreal and because of my sister's death. However, I had just learned from some of the Ennis men, who came out to participate in the ambush, that my home had been raided by Black and Tans and military and that they actually searched the bed on which the dead woman was laid out. This news hurt me very much and nothing would then prevent me from trying to get a chance to hit back as best I could at men who were guilty of such unchristian conduct.

The brigade column which had been formed was not a success from a number of points of view. It was too big and unwieldy and in many of the districts in the rural parts of Mid-Clare, though the people gave what they could with the best of goodwill, still their resources were sorely taxed when 60 or 70 men arrived in the district to be housed and fed. Smaller columns would not provide the same problem and, besides, they would have a better chance of availing of a favourable opportunity to hit the enemy when they were confined to a smaller area. The Brigade Council decided to dissolve the brigade column and to form instead a number of battalion flying columns.

In February 1921 the men who were to constitute the 1st Battalion flying column met at Kearney's Castle. I turned up there and I believe about 20 others. We were short some rifles which were to be supplied to us from the brigade dump, including my own which I had left there after Caherea. James Corry and myself were to go for these guns next day. We stayed at Hogan's house that night and next morning called again at Kearney's which was then Battalion H.Q. to see if there were any dispatches for brigade officers. Just as we reached the door of Kearney's house, we saw two lorries of Tans pulling up at the gate 300 yards off. We ran around to the back of the house being under fire as we did so. We then made off through the fields at the rere. Jack Hassett and a boy scout from Ennis, named Coote, joined us during the retreat and we all reached the top of a hill where the country stretched out into a big open bog. At this point Corry hid in some bushes while we continued into the bog. Unknown to us, more soldiers and Tans had taken up positions in the bog and we found ourselves surrounded.

At this stage fire was being directed at us from all angles but, fortunately, none of us were hit. I was still trying to evade capture when I found myself only 10 yards away from an R.I.C. officer. He was firing from an automatic pistol while

he shouted to me to put up my hands. I then had no option but to do so, but he continued firing until he came close when he hit me on the head with the pistol. My comrades were also captured except Jim Corry who was not found.

After capture we were marched back to Kearney's and there searched several times. Nothing of an incriminatory nature was found on any of us. The house and a large area was thoroughly searched during the course of which a few rifles, single-barreled shotguns and hand grenades were discovered. This material had been brought to the place a couple of days previously along with other weapons, but it had been condemned as not being fit for use. A serviceable rifle and revolver hidden away elsewhere were also captured. These two guns had been placed in hiding by one of the members of the column who had stayed the previous night in Kearney's. It was the practice of some of these men, when staying in a friendly house, to hide their arms and ammunition outside lest the house might be raided and the owner would get into trouble. Before our captors left they set fire to the house and also to whatever hay and straw Mr. Kearney had. He was also arrested. We were taken into Ennis as prisoners and, after a few days, sent on to Limerick Prison where I was confined for the fourth time.

In Limerick, information reached the authorities that an attempt would be made by the I.R.A. to rescue me and I was transferred to the military barracks.

I forgot to mention that while I was detained in the R.I.C. Barracks in Ennis the police tried to connect me with the attack on Ruan Barracks and the Monreal ambush. Two of the police who were captured in Ruan were brought in to identify me, but they could not recognise me.

After a month or so in Limerick, myself and the men who were arrested with me were tried before a military court on charges of levying war against the forces of His Majesty, the

King of England, and being in illegal possession of firearms. We were defended by Mr. Paddy Lynch, K.C., instructed by his cousin Jack Lynch, Solicitor, Ennis. Despite a great defence on our behalf, I was sentenced to life imprisonment. Hassett and Kearney got 15 and 2 years respectively, while Coote was released.

After our sentence we were left in Limerick Prison for about six weeks and then transferred first to Cork Prison and then to Spike Island. In the latter place we joined over 100 other prisoners who had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Most of them were Corkmen, and we were detained in the convict side of the camp. As we were not being treated as political prisoners a hunger strike started and this only lasted four days when a new Governor arrived. He was a decent sort and immediately gave us the treatment for which we went on strike. Food was improved, cell doors were allowed to remain open day and night, parcels were admitted and classes were started. The military guards were also changed and replaced by more humane men. These concessions ended the hunger strike. Under our officers conditions were as agreeable as they could be for the next four or five months. At the end of that time I was among a big batch who were transferred to Kilkenny Jail.

Conditions in Kilkenny were very bad. The military guards there were a bad lot and gave us a tough time. I had a bit of good luck, however; our arrival caused the jail to be overcrowded, especially in the 'long term' wing. As we were lined up to be allocated to cells, I met a warder named Frawley who had been in Mountjoy during the big hunger strike there in 1917. He was in sympathy with Sinn Fein and recognised me as soon as he saw me. He told me to wait back at the end of the line. I did so. There was no more room in the 'Long Term' wing for the last 10 or 12 of the crowd who had come from Spike Island, with the result that they had

to be accommodated with the 'short term' prisoners who numbered about twenty.

These 'short term' prisoners, all political of course, had been working on an escape tunnel. On the night after we joined them we were asked to attend a meeting which they had arranged. To my great delight, I learned that the escape had been planned for the following night and we were to be allowed go with them. The escape plans were explained. A prisoner called McCarrick, a native of Leitrim, was to lead the way through the tunnel which was about 40 yards and opened outside the prison on to the public road. Four others, including myself, were to follow him. As soon as we got outside the tunnel four men were to do guard outside the Warders' houses which were right in front of the exit, where I was to remain to haul out the others as they appeared. Along with McCarrick and myself were three Limerick men named Pyne, Punch and Halloran.

The escape worked out excellently and most of the men had got through until one fool decided to bring his suitcase with him. He tried to force this out in front of him, but in doing so managed to jamb the passage most effectively. Not alone did he prevent the remainder of the men from escaping, but he nearly suffocated them as well. They all had to go back into the prison with him. The warders and the military guards had become alerted and found the unlucky ones inside the tunnel. I was surprised when no more men were coming along, as I had been counting those who had got clear and knew there were others to come. I shouted through the exit hole a few times but got no answer. I then heard the prison staff shouting and knew the game was up. I collected the three Limerick men and followed in the direction in which the others disappeared in the darkness.

Though we had not the faintest idea of the country we got safely into the fields outside Kilkenny and kept wandering further and further away from the city. After a couple of hours we heard a number of lorries coming towards us. We were then at a bridge which had a blind arch and crept into it. The lorries stopped right overhead. They belonged to the military who were obviously on our tracks. A searchlight was flashed on both sides of the bridge, but our luck held and we were not seen. A small party of soldiers were left on guard on the bridge while the lorries moved off. They were not long gone when they returned again, picked up the guard and drove off.

As soon as the coast was clear, we resumed our trek. In the early hours of the morning we saw a light in a house and headed for it. Inside we found a man sitting at the kitchen fire and told him our story. He led us to the captain of the local I.R.A. company. In his place we washed, cleaned our clothes and had a meal. Through his assistance we were passed along from one battalion area to another until, finally after a couple of days, we landed in Doon, Co. Limerick. There I separated from my three companions and made my way to Castleconnell, where the veteran Mid Limerick I.R.A. man, Sean Carroll, took me across the Shannon to Clonlara and there got a pony and trap in which he drove me to Broadford, Co. Clare. I moved on to O'Callaghan's Mills where I met Michael Campbell, who drove me in a car to John Joe McInerney's in Carahan and I stopped in his place until the British troops left the country;

The escape from Kilkenny Jail took place ~~on~~ in November, 1921.

Signed: William McNamara  
(William McNamara)

Date: 24.3.55

Witness: D. Griffin  
(D. Griffin)

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1,135