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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,198 ...

Witness

Thomas Dwyer,
The Courthouse,
Gorey,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Q.M. Wexford Brigade Fianna Eireann;
Member of Nos. 1 and 2 Flying Columns.

Subject.

Fianna Eireann and Irish Volunteer activities,
Enniscorthy, 1915-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

N11

File No. S.2510 ...

Form B S M. 2

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE ^{45.8.1918} 1913-21
No. W.S. 1198

STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS DWYER,
The Courthouse, Gorey, Co. Wexford,
(Formerly of John Street, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford)

The passing of forty years has dimmed the memory of the events of those history-making days of 1915 and reminiscences of the true facts are somewhat vague. However, I, Thomas Dwyer, resident in John Street, Enniscorthy, at the youthful age of thirteen years, joined the Fianna Éireann organisation in Enniscorthy in November, 1915. In charge of the Enniscorthy Company at that time was Captain John Moran. The strength of the company at that time was, as far as I can recollect, about thirty-five to forty members. My most intimate friend in the Sluagh was Jim O'Brien, known affectionately as "Jim of the Tracks" because he lived on the railway. Jim was older than me and, consequently, he was my guiding light; and, throughout the eventful years that were to follow, he was my closest and dearest friend. Other members of the Sluagh at that time were Stephen Hayes, Court Street, Paddy Tobin, Boreen Hill, and John Cardiff, Duffry Street, now deceased.

The Sluagh or Company met two nights weekly and Sundays after Mass, in a club known as "Antwerp", situated in Mary Street, Enniscorthy, and run by the local unit of the Volunteers. After the formation of the first Dáil Éireann in 1919, this group became known as the Irish Republican Army. Here, in that historic house, under the shadow of Enniscorthy Castle and overlooking the River Slaney, we were drilled and trained in the use of signals, and carried out manoeuvres in conjunction with the Enniscorthy Company of the Volunteers. Other activities

of the club included the teaching of the Irish language, Irish history, singing and dancing and the holding of concerts.

This club was the breeding ground of rebellion, for here was instilled into our youthful minds the hatred of the Sassenach, and there grew in us a burning desire to see our country freed from the chains of bondage. We were told how other Irishmen down through the centuries had fought against overwhelming odds and died in a glorious attempt to rid Irish soil of a foreign foe. We learned of the rebellions of Owen Roe, or Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, of Rossa and the Fenians, and we longed for the day when we too might join in the fight against our common enemy.

Even as a boy, I knew that something was about to happen which I could not fully analyse but, with the dawning of the spring of 1916, the scent of another bid for freedom was borne along the breeze. We were detailed to watch R.I.C. manoeuvres and to give the alarm of their approach if they neared "Antwerp". Gradually, as the month of April neared its close, the word, "rising", was to be heard, spoken quietly amongst the boys in the Company, and we knew instinctively that the awaited day was near at hand.

Easter Sunday, 23rd April, 1916, was an eventful day in the life of Enniscorthy, for a massed parade of all Fianna Eireann and Volunteer units took place under the watchful eye of the R.I.C. Then, on Easter Monday, 24th April, a day that will go down in the annals of military history, Ireland's greatest rising to date took place in Dublin when a mere handful of courageous men showed the

world the indomitable spirit of the Irish nation.

Enniscorthy stood in readiness for orders to start the Rising there, under the command of Commandant Seamus Rafter - a great leader and a great Irishman. Our young minds had been alerted to the fighting, which was taking place in the Capital, and we eagerly awaited the moment when we would join in the fight.

On the morning of Wednesday, 26th April, I arrived as usual at Antwerp and, to my amazement, was held up by a strange armed man who challenged my authority to be there. When he was satisfied as to my identity, I was allowed to enter and was immediately given dispatches to take to the house of Commandant Rafter and Seamus Doyle. In Antwerp were six strange men, mud stained and tired from their long cycle from Gorey whence they had come from the previous night. All the men were fully armed and possessed a supply of ammunition, and had come to Enniscorthy to take part in the Rising. The men were Seán Etchingham (in charge of the group), Sean O'Byrne, Sean Doyle, E. McDonagh, I. Funge and J. Gleeson. When they left Antwerp, their arms and ammunition were placed in my custody and, later that evening, I handed them over to Thomas Stokes.

The next day, Thursday, 27th April, saw the Rising in Enniscorthy when the Volunteers mobilised and took over the town. The town hall was seized and used as headquarters, outposts were placed throughout the town and sporadic firing occurred. A detachment of Volunteers kept the R.I.C. barracks in Abbey Square under fire from the turret rocks across the Slaney.

On the morning of the Rising all the arms, ammunition supplies, etc., were taken from the house of Tom Keegan at 10 Irish Street where they had been stored in the old cooper's shop for the long months previous to the Rising. This old shop was a famous hide-out for the making of buckshot and the filling of cartridges, and, if the walls could talk, they could tell many a story. Tom Keegan's nephew, Patrick, was an officer in the Volunteers prior to and during the uprising.

During Enniscorthy's four glorious days as a Republic, my duties included the carrying of reports and dispatches from my commanding officer, Micheál Kehoe, to various outposts in the area. On the Saturday, 29th April, 1916 - two days after the Rising in Enniscorthy - the alarming report was circulated that British army troops were advancing from Wexford towards my native town. The Fianna were ordered to Edermine to carry out reconnaissance on the enemy's movements and report back to Headquarters. However, these rumours were without foundation.

Low Sunday, April 30th, dawned with the fires of freedom beginning to burn low, for the rumour was rife that Dublin, after a courageous and noble struggle, had been forced to surrender. This later proved to be true but the men of Enniscorthy were not convinced, so Seán Etchingham and Seamus Doyle journeyed to Dublin where, in the solitary confines of Arbour Hill prison, they received from Commandant Padraig Pearse's own lips the order to surrender. Meanwhile, in a still resurgent Enniscorthy, all the forces that were available were summoned to the Rink in the Athenaeum where they were

addressed by the leaders of the rebellion. Hearts that had been sinking into the depths of despair rose with a new and burning flame when Fr. Patrick Murphy - now Parish Priest of Glynn - told us that, although we were to surrender, we were to look after our arms and not to let them fall into the hands of the British. His fiery eloquence had a great effect on the morale of the men. He spoke of the gallant fight that the town had put up despite the overwhelming forces of the aggressor who stood ready to hurl the might of an empire upon them with unrelenting fury. We were to carry on in the tradition of our illustrious forefathers, Fr. Murphy said. The day would soon come when, once again, we would shoulder arms against the invader.

So, with that same unconquerable spirit in defeat as in victory, Enniscorthy surrendered on Monday, 1st May, after four days as a Republic. During those days of independence when Enniscorthy re-echoed with the cries of democracy - liberty, equality and fraternity - the Volunteers immortalized themselves and wrote yet another chapter in Ireland's turbulent history.

Monday saw wholesale arrests amongst the leaders and men of the Rising. Some were told they would be executed for the parts they had played in the struggle. As I was too young, I was not arrested, but the youthful members of the Fianna played a great part in hiding whatever guns and ammunition that could be found. Now followed the dark days of despair, with very little active work because of our imprisoned leaders.

Towards the end of 1916 and early in 1917, the men who had participated in the Rising started to be

released. In the autumn of 1917, the Sluagh in Enniscorthy was reorganised and was very quickly at full strength in order to work again, now more earnestly than ever before, against the British. Captain Micheál Kehoe was now in charge of the Enniscorthy Sluagh, Fianna Éireann. At that time Micheál was living in Enniscorthy, but is now N.T. in Glynn and a member of the County Wexford Vocational Education Committee. 1st Lieutenant was my intimate friend, James O'Brien ("Jim of the Tracks"), who to-day lives in Carlow and works in the Beet Factory. Section Leaders were Mylie Moore, a brilliant student who later obtained a degree in Commerce in the N.U.I., but his brilliant career was closed by his untimely death on January 20th, 1931, at the youthful age of twenty-eight years. He now rests peacefully amongst his family and friends in the New Cemetery, Enniscorthy, and a memorial, in the shape of the Fianna badge, was erected over his grave by his dearest friend, Jim O'Brien - a tribute to a gallant soldier and a great Irishman. Stephen Hayes, Enniscorthy, became Brigade O/C of the Fianna after Jim O'Brien's arrest and imprisonment, and carried the burden of leadership through a very difficult period when the British were staging an all-out offensive against the Irish nation. Padraig Tobin, Boreen Hill, Enniscorthy, later became Vice O/C of the Brigade. He was the son of an old I.R.B. man who was arrested for his participation in the Rising of 1916. Paddy Gibbons, hailing from the same street as myself (John Street), - he now resides in Athy, Co. Kildare, - was my Section Commander. He was a native Irish speaker, it being his greatest ambition to teach us the language of the Gael.

Drill, map reading, signalling, morse code, the

use and maintenance of fire-arms, the making of ammunition, etc., were now carried on in Antwerp with renewed vigour. The Volunteer headquarters for A. Company was subject to much attention by the British forces from now on. Also at this time there existed in Enniscorthy another Volunteer club, situated in the building known to-day as the Rafter Memorial Hall in Lower Church Street. This was used by B. Company of the Volunteers.

A memorable day came for us towards the close of 1917 when we were ordered to parade at the Hilly Field, Blackstoops. In this field, on the banks of the historic Slaney and under the shadow of Vinegar Hill, we were engaged in target practice with .22 rifles, a prize being awarded to the best shot.

One of my greatest moments came in the New Year of 1918 when I wore the new Fianna uniform for the first time. We prided ourselves on acquiring it, for it was the first occasion that the Fianna had worn uniforms and they symbolized something Irish. Green tunic, with hat, dark trousers and green puttees, was the uniform worn by this new force that was to figure prominently in the days ahead. Several parades were carried out in the new uniforms. Our first major parade was to a Feis in New Ross on Pentecost Sunday in 1918 when members of the Sluagh had entered in the various competitions. A Fianna hurling team, of which I was a member, fielded against a team from Waterford. Travelling to New Ross by train the previous night, we slept in a house in Mary Street where a party lasted into the early hours of the morning. I shall never forget listening to the singing of Irish songs, and it was here, for the first time, that I heard the ancient ballad, "Skibbereen",

being sung, and the passing of thirty-six years has not erased the knowledge of that beautiful song. On Sunday Commandant Seamus Rafter arrived in New Ross and distributed money to all the lads which, at that time, was a welcome asset.

Later that day, we gave out propaganda handbills, dealing, I think, with the German Plot.

We returned home on Monday, and Captain Kehoe appealed to us to polish up our Irish as we had fared very badly in the Feis. However, our youthful minds were more interested in arms than in Irish. The next two months sped by with amazing rapidity while we trained hard and helped in the making of ammunition.

Then on the night of August 27th, 1918, a muffled explosion rocked Antwerp, and scenes of indescribable confusion followed, for, at first, few were aware of what had happened. Later on that night, we were called together and told the harrowing details of the shocking tragedy that had befallen Commandant Seamus Rafter who had been blown up while moving munitions. For seventeen long days and nights, while Seamus Rafter lay delirious between life and death, our job was to watch the movements of the R.I.C., whose headquarters were only two hundred yards away from the dying man's bedside, and report on their activities.

Then, after his long agony, the end came when, on 12th September, 1918, Seamus Rafter passed to his eternal reward. As a fitting tribute to a courageous soldier, he was waked in the Cathedral in Enniscorthy and, around his coffin, members of the Fianna, in uniform, formed a guard-of-honour. His commandant's uniform and sword lay on his coffin.

On the following Sunday a thousand Volunteers, members of Fianna Eireann, Cumann na mBan and the public marched in torrential rain to his last resting place in Ballindaggin Cemetery, five miles from Enniscorthy. There, under an incessant downpour as the wind swept down from the slopes of Mount Leinster, Seamus Rafter - a name that will remain immortal in the annals of Enniscorthy's fight for freedom - was laid to rest, close to the place that gave him birth. Before a large, sorrowful gathering, the smuggled guns rang out their final farewell. His life and work had been an inspiration to all and, even in death, the ideals, for which he stood, would be carried on with increasing fervour until not one foreign soldier disturbed the tranquil beauty of the Ireland which Seamus Rafter loved. Then began the long march back to Enniscorthy, to work for the ideals which Seamus Rafter had placed before each and every one of us.

In the wake of Seamus Rafter's funeral came numerous arrests of Volunteers who had participated in the funeral ceremony, and another phase in Enniscorthy's rousing history was about to commence.

With the arrival of the year 1919, the desire amongst the lads to fight the invader became a prime enterprise of the human heart, for all the boys, including myself, were maturing to manhood. Like all youthful Irishmen, fighting blood was in our veins and we wanted to carry out raids for arms but the higher authority was against this move.

During the summer of 1919, we had week-end training camps in Kavanagh's field at St. John's. The course, which included P.T. exercises, was under the

command of Jim O'Brien. Young lads knocked great enjoyment out of camp life, cooking their own food and singing songs around the camp fire, finishing the night with that grand Irish custom - the Rosary. This life toughened us for the long, bitter struggle that lay ahead. One incident during those camp days that will always remain vivid in my memory was when we awoke one morning to discover that we had no milk for breakfast. So a cow had to be found. I was the only one in the party who could milk, so I was allotted the task of getting it wherever I could. Dick Cullen and myself decided to go across to an adjoining field owned by Reilly's of Enniscorthy. Their practice was to milk the cows in the field; so we were trying to get a cow to stand still so that I could milk her. During this performance, Jack Doyle, the old fellow who used milk the cows, arrived unseen at our backs while we coaxed, unsuccessfully, to get her to stand easy. Then a wise old voice sarcastically remarked, "Go to the other side, Tom, and she'll stand easy". To our horror, we did not know whether to run or stand easy but, throwing caution to the wind, I did as he said and got the milk. So, after all, we enjoyed a happy breakfast.

Throughout the year 1919, we managed to scrounge a few small-arms, in readiness for an attempt to raid for more modern weapons. Our Intelligence service had been to work concerning the acquisition of arms and, on their information, a party was organised under the command of Stephen Hayes to raid Dr. Furlong's residence at Lymington Road. This raid took place in December, 1919. The members of this unofficial raiding party were Paddy Maguire, Watty Sutton, Padraig Tobin,

Har Connors and myself. Har Connors was a fearless soldier, with a great mop of red hair, and on all the raids for arms which we carried out, Har's mop of red hair was always mistaken for that of a red-headed postman by the name of Thomas Francis Meagher. As Meagher was a very active I.R.A. man, he came under suspicion by the R.I.C. during subsequent investigations. The raid on Furlong's proved successful and we obtained a gun, field-glasses, maps, protractors, etc. Thoroughly organised, the raid was carried out without a hitch and no opposition was encountered. The efficient execution of this raid was a great "feather in our caps". Although intense police investigations followed, none of the party was detected.

At this time, I was working in Davis's foundry with three or four other Fianna lads - Tom Sinnott, Belfield (now living in Newbridge, Co. Kildare), Eamon Newsome, who afterwards emigrated to far-off Australia, and Pat Conway, John Street, Enniscorthy (deceased). Our employment here greatly assisted the Fianna because we were able to keep them supplied with moulds for making buckshot and lead. However, we were not able to steal crucibles for melting brass during ordinary working hours, so it was decided to raid the foundry. The same party staged the raid which took place in late December, 1919, and the attempt again proved successful. Har Connors was again on this raid, and it would be appropriate to mention here that this lad was later to meet a tragic death in a shooting accident.

Inspired by the success of the two previous raids, an official raiding party under Jim O'Brien decided to raid the residence of Colonel T. Ryan - an ex British

army officer - who lived in New Street, now Weafer Street, Enniscorthy. This party were all members of the Fianna. Most of the lads were terrified with the idea of raiding a Colonel's house as the consequences, in the event of detection, would be disastrous. However, fears were set aside and the raid was executed in early 1920. We were led to understand that Ryan possessed a good quantity of arms but, unfortunately, we were unable to find any. In after years, we found out what a shrewd old character the Colonel was, for apparently he anticipated something like that might happen and he had hidden whatever arms he had in the house. On the night we raided the house, we were unable to locate anything except a few maps, compasses, protractors and a pair of field glasses which we took. The raid was again a success in so far as none of the raiders was detected.

The next raid followed almost immediately and was on F.P. Roche's, Slaney Lodge, Enniscorthy - corn merchants. This party was the largest of its kind which had ever attempted a raid up to this time, and included about twenty-five members of the Fianna under Jim O'Brien, Padraig Tobin and John Cardiff (deceased). Unfortunately, no arms were obtained.

After Roche's raid, P. Shaw's, Newsagents, in Slaney Street, Enniscorthy, was raided, but little of any use was obtained. The reason for this raid was that Shaw was Town Clerk and very hostile towards the national movement. Also, at this time, the Urban Council were directly opposed to the republican movement.

Information from varied sources led to an official raid on Wilkies' house - the gatehouse of the

Rectory. Here we were successful in securing a revolver which was added to our growing store of arms. About ten men, including myself, participated in this raid.

Around this time also, constant raids were made on the goods store at Enniscorthy railway station, and Belfast-made goods were seized and burnt. This was part of the campaign to boycott anything which the British had to do with. A bicycle, coming by rail to one of the Black and Tans stationed in Enniscorthy, was seized and smashed to pieces with an iron bar.

Towards the end of the spring of 1920, a large-scale raid was executed by the combined forces of the I.R.A. and the Fianna on a petrol depot at Donohoe's, Railway Square, Enniscorthy. Between ninety and a hundred men were engaged in this operation, as the petrol in those days was stored in tins and had to be transported in two lorries to an unknown destination. This raid commenced about 11 p.m. and went on into the early hours of the morning; and how such a large concentration of men escaped detection was a tribute to the thorough organisation and efficient manner in which the operation was carried out. Several hundred gallons of petrol were captured, and this fuel was afterwards of invaluable help in carrying out other raids and operations. Intense police activity followed this raid, but we were not apprehended.

In May, 1920, an attack was staged on Clonroche barracks by the I.R.A., but the garrison refused to surrender after being under sporadic fire throughout the night. I was not engaged directly with this attack,

but was on duty watching R.I.C. activities in Enniscorthy, eight miles away from Clonroche.

Between constant drilling and the numerous raids for arms, activities in the town were becoming intense and things were getting close to boiling point - ready to explode at any moment with the slightest incident setting the fuse alight. Police activity was now greater than at any period in the history of the town. Because of the success which our guerilla forces were having, the R.I.C. garrison had been implemented with a motley gang of Black and Tans.

Then one night in September, 1920, a combined force of I.R.A. and Fianna raided every house in the district where a shotgun was known to be. As a result of this daring operation a very large number of shotguns came into our possession.

About this time, I was appointed Brigade Quartermaster of the Wexford Brigade, Fianna Eireann. Prior to this, the Fianna, which had been growing in numbers, spread its wings over the entire county, and a Wexford Brigade had been formed. Incidentally, I was the first Brigade Quartermaster. Officers of the Brigade were: Jim O'Brien, Commandant; Vice Commandant, Stephen Hayes; Brigade Adjutant, Pdraig Tobin; Intelligence Officer and Organiser, John Cardiff. Now, I was responsible for looking after all the arms, ammunition, supplies, etc., from Wexford to Gorey, and my position was getting more uncomfortable from day to day, as I was now under suspicion by the R.I.C. All the officers of the Brigade had a most dangerous and difficult time going around inspecting the various

companies. As Brigade Quartermaster, I had charge of hiding the arms, etc., and I was greatly indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Jer Cullen, Kilcarbery, and Mr. and Mrs. Har Sullivan, Tommalosset, for allowing me to hide such stores in their respective houses. Both of those houses offered their hospitality to the men who were fighting the invader, and their doors were always open as a refuge to hunted men. In the struggle for independence they played a greater part than the men who actually did the fighting, for they took far greater risks in the sheltering of men who were on the run. They stood the risk of paying the supreme penalty for hiding wanted men, but they were only too willing and happy to be of some service to their country.

The officers of the Brigade had reason to believe that certain members of the community were tipping-off the R.I.C. by letter about the identity of the members of the Fianna and I.R.A., who were engaged in the different operations against the enemy. For that reason, a force of about ten to fifteen men of the I.R.A. and Fianna staged a raid for mails on the Wexford-Dublin train at Enniscorthy station. All the men participating in this engagement were armed. While the goods train was shunting around Enniscorthy station at night, the party boarded the train and seized the mails. The mail bags were brought from the station in a pony and cart - the property of Mrs. Carroll, Irish Street, who had two sons in the movement at the time, Jackie and Michael. Michael was a member of the 1st Battalion staff of the Fianna. The mails were brought to the back gate of the Mental Hospital where, as arranged by Miss Annie O'Neill (laundress), the back

gate and door of the laundry had been left open to give us admission. Markie Kirwan, an employee of the Mental Hospital, who was also on the raiding party, was also responsible for having these arrangements made. Miss O'Neill (deceased), the laundress in the Mental Hospital, was a member of Cumann na mBan and a very active worker in the movement. Markie Kirwan, as brave a soldier who ever bore arms against the British, died last year in far-off United States - the land of his adoption. Here in the laundry, the captured mails were sorted and some information obtained. We hoped that this raid would inspire fear and terror into the minds of those who might have any intention of informing to the R.I.C. by letter and deter them from doing so.

Also on this night, the foundation of the North Wexford Flying Column was laid, although it was not formed until sometime later. The following are the names of some of the men who were engaged on the raid for mails: in charge was Jack Whelan; Tom Roche, Markie Kirwan, Paddy Tobin, Stephen Hayes, Jim O'Brien and myself. On the morning after the raid, Markie Kirwan led us down to the main Wexford-Enniscorthy road where we intended to give the mails to a passing postman by the name of Larry Doyle. We were armed and masked. At first, he refused to take the mails but later, under pressure, he consented and took them. The raid for the mails took place in October, 1920.

At this stage, I was given a .45 Webley revolver by Jack Whelan, O.C. of A. Company, I.R.A. This was

the first time I had possessed such a formidable weapon and it made me very proud indeed. This weapon was to be my permanent companion for many a long day.

I was still working in Davis's foundry but I found now that the time had come when the two jobs could not mix, so I gave up my work and devoted my full time to the work of the Fianna and the cause of Irish freedom.

Tension, which had been steadily mounting, exploded with the arrest of Paddy Tobin and Paddy Gibbons in the small public house at the top of Irish Street, which was a well-known hide-out for members of the I.R.A. and the Fianna in the last week of October, 1920. So the first round of the new struggle went to the R.I.C. The two arrested men had not been sleeping at home for some time because they had been under suspicion by the R.I.C. Paddy's arrest came very unexpectedly. After having been tried and sentenced, Paddy was jailed in Waterford. The Brigade wanted certain information which was in Paddy's possession, so I was detailed to visit him in Waterford jail to obtain that information. My task was made comparatively easy, due to the fact that the checker on the Dublin-Wexford mail train was Willie Nolan - a great friend of the cause who was always ready to render the most valuable assistance. While I was visiting Paddy in Waterford jail, Willie Nolan took charge of my .45 revolver. I experienced no difficulty in seeing him and obtained the required information.

About this time, several meetings of the proposed North Wexford Flying Column were held in Ballindagin Hall, under the command of Jack ("Waxer") Whelan. It

was about this time too that Waxer was arrested while cycling back from Kelly's of Ballycarney. He had been there making arrangements to have the arms, which were stored there, removed as they were needed for the use of the column. Waxer's arrest and subsequent imprisonment threw the plans for the formation of the column out of gear. With Waxer's imprisonment, Tom Roche assumed command.

The unexpected arrests of Tobin, Gibbons, Waxer and many others led us to believe that a Tan spy ring was operating in Enniscorthy. So it was decided to administer a very strong warning to two individuals, named Newsome and Foley, ordering them not to collaborate or associate themselves with the Tans and R.I.C. A party of the proposed column - Tom Roche (deceased), Jim ("Gigger") Whelan, Markie Kirwan (deceased) and myself, along with several members of the Fianna, learned from the Fianna that Foley and Newsome were standing at Coffey's Corner in Market Square, Enniscorthy. This incident occurred at night. We went up to the corner, called Newsome and brought him down three or four doors towards Slaney Street. We gave him a strong warning and told him that we would shoot him if he gave any more information to the authorities. While we were talking to him, a party of R.I.C. came up Slaney Street from the Bridge. When we spotted the R.I.C., our attention left Newsome who immediately bolted and ran back along the Square towards Coffey's Corner - a distance of about twenty yards. As he approached the corner, we drew our revolvers and fired at him but he escaped around the corner. With that, the R.I.C. and Tans opened fire on us. We returned their fire and forced them to retreat down

Slaney Street for cover. We ran towards Castle Hill and across the Bridge, escaping in the direction of the Mental Hospital. They did not follow us, and we spent the night in the laundry in the Mental Hospital. From now on, we were wanted men. Newsome, the traitor, did not hesitate to inform on us and gave all our names and addresses. Half-an-hour later, all our homes were raided and were raided continuously from that onwards. We were now on the run and were marked men.

To evade capture, we took to the mountains and, from that night onwards, we lived on the generosity and hospitality of the people of the country. It would be an impossible task to mention the names of all those good people who afforded us refuge when we needed it most during this time and until the Truce. They are deserving of the greatest praise, for, in sheltering us wanted men, they were taking the chance of having their homes wrecked and their houses burnt. Amongst all those names are a few outstanding people by whom we were always welcomed with open arms. If their houses were raided, we could nearly always manage to escape, but for them there was no escape. Hence the ultimate success of the war of independence was due in no small measure to such great people.

A few weeks after that eventful night in Enniscorthy when we went on the run, we met at Ballindaggin Hall and here, with the immortal spirit of Seamus Rafter urging us on, the North Wexford Flying Column was formed under the command of Thomas Doyle,

The Piers, Ballindaggin. Second in command was Tom Roche (deceased), and the following men: Jim (Gigger) Whelan, Enniscorthy, Frank Gibbons, Tom Meagher, Maurice Spillane, all from Enniscorthy town; Paddy Dwyer, Toumalosset, Enniscorthy; Markie Kirwan, Enniscorthy; John Maguire, Clologue, Ferns; Ned Murphy, Cloneyburne; Andy Nolan, Ballindaggin; Stephen Pender, Ferns; John Dundon, Ballindaggin; Owen Redmond, Ferns; Aidan Kirwan, Ferns, and myself.

The first ambush planned to be carried out by the Column was on the main Enniscorthy-Kilkenny road, between Ballindaggin and Kiltaly, at a place known as Kehoe's Cuttings. For three days and nights the Column waited in vain for an R.I.C. patrol which did not come. Frank Gibbons, the humorist of the column, wittily remarked on the last day that the column lay in ambush, as he carried a giant home-made bomb about, "If anyone from Lloyd George to Ned Pepper comes along, I'll throw it at them". (Ned Pepper was a telegram boy in Enniscorthy)

The column was constantly on the move in North Wexford looking for suitable positions from which to engage the enemy. Several times we lay in ambush, but the expected patrols never seemed to show up.

The first ambush, where a shot was fired, was under the leadership of Phil Lennon (deceased), one time O.C. of the entire County before the Brigade was split into two divisions - North and South. We lay in ambush for an R.I.C. cycle patrol at Munfin, Ballycarney, on the main road from Bunclody as far as Ballycarney and went back via Clohamon to Bunclody. After several hours

waiting, there was no sign of the cycle patrol. But, with that, a Ford car came along the road, loaded with R.I.C. The car was almost upon us before we realised what its human cargo was. We opened fire on the moving vehicle and managed to wound one of the occupants, a Sergeant Torsney, but the car shot through. It was only as an afterthought that we decided to fire on the car. This was the first actual ambush in Co. Wexford, and I remember that because Phil Lennon afterwards remarked, "It is the first ambush in the county and I am proud to have been in it".

When R.I.C. activities against us became too intense, the column split up into pairs, and each group carried out little engagements on their own initiative which are not worth relating.

As arranged, the column met in a fortnight and reformed. One night, late in December, 1920, the column advanced on Bunclody (then Newtownbarry). No concrete plans had been laid but we were merely looking for an R.I.C. patrol in the town. However, no such patrol was encountered, but we received information that an R.I.C. constable, by the name of Jones, was drinking in Brennan's public house (now Kinsella's), on the corner of the Square in the town. Two members of the column, Ned Murphy and Maurice Spillane, went inside. Both were armed. When the constable saw the two strangers enter, he came towards them. Immediately, they opened fire on him and shot him dead. This was the second killing of R.I.C. men in the county - the first being the shooting of Lee Wilson at Gorey in early 1920.

After this shooting, the column moved through

Ballindaggin and Killealy to our headquarters at Askinviller, where we had a most pleasant stay, grubbing with Mrs. Cowman and family. We slept in straw in Devereux's old disused house. Conditions were appalling, for it was now in the heart of winter and we had no bed-clothes of any description. Also, we had no change of clothes for weeks and we were getting most uncomfortable. The sixteen members of the column were billeted on all the good people of the locality, from whom we received two meals a day. What we suffered in personal discomfort was made up by the splendid meals which those people provided for us. With darkness, we would all converge on the house of good old Mrs. Cowman who lived there with her husband and family. There, until late into the night, we would have a sing-song, concluding with Thomas Francis Meagher's vigorous rendering of "The Old Side-Car".

In January, 1921, Bill Kavanagh, Ferns, escaped from the County Home in Enniscorthy. Prior to that, he had been held prisoner by the Devonshire Regiment in Enniscorthy Courthouse but, as a result of beatings received, he had been moved to the County Home; from there, he escaped. Sometime after this, he joined the column. As a result of a shooting incident in Gorey, Jimmy Kenny, Ballycale, and Pat Fitzpatrick, Killealy, (a rate collector in Gorey) were also forced to join the column. Also at this time, the strength of the column was reinforced by Mosie Somers and John Furlong, both from Enniscorthy.

Early in the spring of 1921, the column was ordered to move into the Gorey district. As we were travelling entirely at night and guided by scouts from

the different companies in whose areas we passed through, the route we took is not very clear to me. Our first stop after leaving Ballindaggin was at Bill Murphy's house, situated at the Bleech, near Ballyduff, Camolin. Here we were afforded all the hospitality possible, and the members of this household deserve great credit for the part they played and the chances they took. From here we moved to Dan McDonald's at Kilmichael, about three miles from Gorey. The idea of coming here was to rest for the night before moving into Gorey, to carry out some plan which had been organised by the Gorey Company, I.R.A.

When we arrived at McDonald's, the Gorey Company, or whoever was responsible, had made no provisions for the feeding of the column or for some sleeping accommodation for them. When we arrived there, we were weary and hungry after marching from the Bleech, but we did not receive anything to eat for twelve to fourteen hours and, when the food did come, it was from Mount St. Benedict. We were only three fields away from the school at Mount St. Benedict and, when it was known that we were at McDonald's, the good matron, Miss Eibhlis Kehoe, dispatched food to us without delay. Miss Kehoe herself was a great Irish lady and a staunch republican and she had been imprisoned for her activities.

Conditions were so deplorable that some members of the column went to the nearest shop which was in Hollyfort and, being strangers, they aroused suspicion. However, in the circumstances, they could hardly be blamed for their actions. As a result of their escapades, the R.I.C. in Gorey were alerted and informed that a party of strangers were in the Hollyfort area.

Up to a short time prior to this, there had been an R.I.C. garrison in Hollyfort and some of the garrison's wives and families were still there and, consequently, were very hostile to the Republican movement.

On that night as darkness settled over Kilmichael, we were about to get ready to move into Gorey. We were waiting for the scout, who was to guide us into the town, when we were alarmed by the sound of whistles. Members of the column rushed out in alarm, scattering in all directions.

Five of us - Johnny Maguire, Jimmy Kenny, John Furlong, Aidan Kirwan and myself - found ourselves in a small field at the back of the house. We heard voices and steps and thought it was the guides we were expecting from Gorey. One of us yelled, "Halt! Who goes there?", and the numbing reply came, "R.I.C. line the ditch".

With that, firing came from all directions and scenes of confusion followed as the column attempted to escape. Aided by the darkness, all the column managed to slip through the R.I.C. lines. There were no casualties on either side, other than that Tom Roche sprained his ankle and had to be carried from there to Askamore. How the entire column succeeded in effecting its escape was a mystery, for Dan McDonald's house was entirely surrounded by the R.I.C. It was about 6 p.m. when we made our escape, and six hours later, after wandering aimlessly through the countryside, we found ourselves in Craanford, only two and a half miles away from McDonald's. None of us knew the geography of the countryside, so it was the blind leading the blind. When we arrived in Craanford, Johnny Maguire knew where

we were, and went into a shop owned by Buckstown Doyle, a brother of Captain Seamus Doyle, and got biscuits and lemonade for us. And were they welcome!

After walking all night over uneven countryside, bogs, rivers and ploughed fields, we were extremely tired, and so we decided to travel along the main Gorey-Carnew road in the direction of Carnew. While walking along, we heard the sound of approaching lorries and had just leaped across the ditch and got under cover when two lorries, laden with Black and Tans and R.I.C., came along. Lucky for us, we were not spotted. When they had passed, we got back on to the road and walked past Knock Brandon Creamery where we turned and went up a long lane. At the end of this lane which was a considerable distance from the road, we came across a farmer's house. Being completely exhausted after our desperate journey from Kilmichael, we decided to sleep in a cowhouse where we had discovered a quantity of straw. This was about 1 a.m. in the morning. The five of us spent a most uncomfortable night, as we were all wet through, after slogging waist-deep through rivers and bogs.

One of the party, Jimmy Kenny, who had a great sense of humour, knew something about cows, so he said that, if some sort of vessel or jar could be found, he would milk one of the cows which were in the house where we were sleeping. Nothing capable of holding milk could be found, so Jimmy calmly lay down under the cow and milked her into his mouth.

Next morning, we made our presence known to the people who owned the farm (I cannot remember their names) and, kindly enough, they provided us with a good

breakfast which was certain welcome, as we had eaten nothing since the previous evening.

In order to get in touch with the Askamore Company, we crossed over Ballyconran Hill and into the Askamore area. We surmised that the remainder of the Column would make for this area also, and we hoped to contact them. For several hours we waited under cover and were contacted by some of the members of the Askamore Company who were apparently on the look-out for us. At this time, the Askamore Company was under the command of Thomas Kenny of Brideswell. From here, we were led to a small, galvanised house overlooking Askamore chapel, where we found most of the column safe and sound. They had arrived there the previous night. However, two or three were still missing, including Thomas Doyle, The Piers, Ballindaggin, who was in charge of the column. He managed to evade capture and showed up later on. There we learned the adventures of other members of the column in their hectic flight from the R.I.C. drag-net at Kilmichael. Mr. John McGrath and the Askamore Company had provided us with a sumptuous meal in the small house, and it resembled a hotel. While in Askamore on this occasion and on many others, we were always treated with the greatest hospitality, notably by John McGrath who was a great friend to the nation during her darkest hours.

At this stage, I have reached a point in my narrative where I am inclined to get confused, for I am not quite sure whether the Column was disbanded after this, or not, but at some time we were disbanded in the Askamore area. As was customary, the Column split up

into groups of three or four, and we went off to the different areas allotted to us. Bill Kavanagh of Ferns, Har Connors and myself went to Ferns where we consulted Joe Killeen, who was in charge of the Ferns Company, about the activities of the enemy. In company with Joe Killeen, we made plans to throw a home-made bomb at an R.I.C. patrol which guarded the mail car as it came up Ferns Main Street. From Killeen, who was a postman, we learned that the mail car, escorted by about six policemen, went from the post office to the railway station every night at about 11 p.m., and returned with the mails about half an hour afterwards. We decided to attack them as they came up the Main Street on the way back from the station.

Engaged on this attack were Bill Kavanagh, Har Connors, Joe Killeen and myself. We were against Killeen participating in this operation for two reasons. Firstly, he was too well known in Ferns, and, secondly, the difficulty of disposing of him after the attack. However, he insisted on being in on the raid and we could not persuade him to the contrary - such were his fighting spirit and unbounded enthusiasm.

We lay in wait behind a wall, about half-way up the hill in the main street of Ferns. This wall, which was fairly high, was situated opposite the main Enniscorthy road and where the National bank is now built. The mail car, which was drawn by a donkey, was driven by an old postman named Tom Conway and it was our intention not to harm him, at all costs. For that reason, it was necessary to let two of the patrol nearest the post car go by, before we hurled the bomb at the remaining four. This was complicated enough but, to make matters worse, it

was a home-made bomb and would take a considerable time to explode after it was thrown, and so would give the R.I.C. time to run for cover.

As we lay silently in wait for the precise moment for action, we could hear old Conway talking to the donkey as he encouraged it up the hill. Then, just after the mail car had passed by, Kavanagh, I think, hurled the bomb out into the roadway at the patrol and we opened fire, but with negative results. The bomb exploded all right but none of the R.I.C. was hurt as they had sufficient time to dash for cover. As we raced furiously from the scene, we heard Tom Conway reciting his prayers.

Racing quickly away from the spot, we circled Ferns and made for Tombrack. Here we left Joe Killeen who went to stay at Nolan's public house. Tom Nolan was a great Irishman and his home was always open to any of the men engaged in the struggle for freedom. From here, the three of us hit out across country to Bolinrush - situated high up on the side of Sliabh Buidhe - where we spent the night in Nolan's, another great family who took incalculable risks in sheltering men on the run, and they were especially kind to me and, in a way, saved my life later on. For a time after this, he hid here.

Towards the end of the spring of 1921, the Column was reformed at Askamore and we were ordered by the Brigade O.C. to make our way across country to Cody's of Corrigreen, near Rathnure. This route proved exceedingly difficult and tough, as we had to move by night with the utmost caution for police activities had been intensified during recent weeks. Our first halt was at Ballindaggin where we spent a night. On the next night, we advanced

towards Kiltalealy and spent the night in Askinviller. We moved again the next night and crossed the Blackstairs Mountain to Corrigeen.

Following the incidents in Hollyfort, most of the Column was temporarily disbanded, so we had to live from house to house for the next three weeks. Eventually, the old Column, with the exception of four or five individuals, was recalled and a new column of thirty men was formed under the command of Commandant Myles Breen, Tinashrule, Ballyduff. The other members of the Column, as far as I can recall, were: Captain Paddy Kenny (R.I.P.) of Ballycarney; Lieutenant John Kelly, Lieutenant James O'Neill, Luke Byrne, Ned Murphy (R.I.P.), Mogue Murphy (R.I.P.), Patrick Murphy, Andy Nolan, John Quirk, Matt Flynn, Wm. Cosgrave (R.I.P.), Tom Doyle, John Kinsella, James O'Toole, James D. Kelly, James M. Kelly, Richard Hume (R.I.P.), Patrick Carton, Michael O'Brien, Stephen Pender, Markie Kirwan (R.I.P.), Maurice Spillane (R.I.P.), Thomas Meagher, John Maguire, Michael Maguire, James Kenny, Aidan Kenny, Joe Gibbons, John Dundon, Patrick Fitzpatrick, James Whelan and myself.

The first engagement of the new Column was to be an ambush at Inch, a village on the Wexford-Wicklow border and, for that reason, we were ordered to move into the Gorey district. The route we took from Corrigeen to Inch was about forty miles approximately. As far as I can recollect, the Column's first stop was at Bill Murphy's of the Bleach where we spent a most enjoyable night.

When we were at Murphy's, we obtained a mine that was to be used at the Inch ambush. This mine had been made by Daniel Byrne, an expert on explosives. Strange

to relate, Dan Byrne was tragically killed about a year later by this same mine. The mine was laid on the road at Inch to blow up a lorry patrol which did not come. Eventually, the mine was captured by the R.I.C. who brought it to Gorey barracks. It was never exploded and remained there until after the Truce. When the Truce was signed, the I.R.A. took over the barracks and, while experimenting with the mine which he had made, Dan Byrne was killed when it accidentally exploded, and thus passed from our midst a true and loyal Irishman.

After the Bleech, we halted at Doyle's of Buckstown and from there we cut down through Monaseed over to Slievebawn and up on to the Mount Hill where we were met by two scouts from the Craanford Company. They were Murt Kavanagh and Dinny Maher. We rested on the Mount Hill and, from Murt Kavanagh, we learned the history of the locale, of the infamous Hunter Gowan who owned the estate, on which we were now encamped, back in the days of 1798 but which were now owned by Rev. Dom J.F. Sweetman who was running the well known Benedictine College there at this time.

The mine, which we had brought from Murphy's of the Bleech, was very heavy and had to be carried all the way to Inch. On the top of the Mount Hill, the mine was being carried by Dick Hume, who was tired hauling it around. On this occasion, his patience became exhausted, so he drew his small .22 revolver and, in a jest, threatened to shoot someone if they did not carry the mine for him.

Leaving the Mount Hill behind us, we crossed the Bann River by means of a foot bridge at Ballingarry.

This was a very unreliable construction and it was only possible for one person to cross at a time, and Thomas Meagher lost his balance and fell in, getting a wetting. From Ballingarry we went via Bolacreen and Coolinteggart to a disused house at Errity's of Ballyconlore which was only a short distance away from Inch. Here, very little food had been provided for the Column.

This was the night before Inch ambush, and Paddy Carton and myself were on sentry duty. As we were hungry, we decided to make a meal out of whatever food was available - potatoes and butter we discovered. So we boiled the potatoes and had a great meal.

At day-break, the Column moved into the ambush position at the Cuttings, about three hundred yards on the Gorey side of the village of Inch. The Cuttings was situated on the main Dublin-Wexford road, about five miles north of Gorey and a corresponding distance south of Arklow. Because of trees and the twisting nature of the road, we could not be seen from Inch village. In Inch there was a telephone exchange. The Column lay in a high bank overlooking the road.

Information had been received by the Column that a lorry load of R.I.C. and Tans would be coming to Gorey on this particular Saturday morning. However, this lorry did not come through Inch but, as we learned later, it by-passed Inch. By 11 a.m. the lorry had not arrived. As this was the first Saturday in May (1921), there was a fair in Gorey and a cycle patrol of six R.I.C. men and Tans were sent from Coolgreaney to Gorey via Inch.

Fears of being ambushed forced the enemy police patrols to travel in extended formation at this time and,

for that reason, they were usually in groups of two stretched out at intervals of about a quarter of a mile. When this cycle patrol passed through the Cuttings, the order was given by the O.C. to fire. One policeman, named Duprey, was killed and another was wounded. The other four escaped.

This position was most suitable for an attack on a lorry, but not for an ambush on a cycle patrol because the police were too far apart. Also, the road was too twisting with numerous corners very close together.

Some of the men wanted to go down to the road and collect the guns off the dead and wounded men, but the O.C. was against it and for a very good reason, because our position was extremely dangerous. The O.C. pointed out that we could easily be surrounded because three roads enclosed us in a triangle whose longest side would be only about one mile.

Accordingly, we pulled out and hid for the rest of the day in Ballinstreagh Woods. As a reprisal against the killing and shooting of the R.I.C. at Inch, Gorey fair was dispersed and the house of Mrs. Margaret Veney - an ardent Republican supporter - was burnt to the ground by the enemy.

The Column moved from Ballinstreagh to the home of Paddy Kenny, Captain of the Craanford Company who lived at Ballydarragh, close to the main road and only three miles from Gorey. When we arrived at Paddy Kenny's house on Saturday night, Paddy had to go to Gorey to get food in order to feed the Column. After a well-earned meal and rest, we marched to Murphy's of the Bleach where we stayed under cover for several days, waiting for police activities to die down.

After leaving the Bleech, I think we moved to Aughlamaunamen into the 4th Battalion area which was under the command of the late Tom Brennan. In conjunction with members of the 4th Battalion, we moved to the Cobbler's Lane, Tinahely, where we waited in ambush. While there, we were spotted by some undesirable person who would have been likely to inform, so we were obliged to pull out.

The next place for the Column to lie in ambush was on the main Ferns-Enniscorthy road, between Ferns and Scarawalsh, but the patrol did not arrive. From that point, we moved up into the Blackstairs Mountains.

With the end of May, 1921, came an ambush by the Column at Chapel near Clonroche. Captain J. Kehoe, Clonroche, guided us in that position. Information to hand was that a patrol of six R.I.C. men came daily from Clonroche to Chapel Station to collect supplies. The section of road where the ambush was to take place was very flat, and it was possible for the first man on the right side of the ambush position to be seen from Clonroche Barracks. Johnny Maguire was placed at this spot and ordered to open fire with his parabellum, when the sixth man of the patrol passed by his position. Incidentally, a parabellum had a different report from any other type of firearm and was very easily recognisable. To avoid a recurrence of what had happened at Inch, we were spread down the road at intervals for about half a mile from where Maguire was positioned. On this occasion, only two R.I.C. men turned up and they cycled past under the muzzles of our guns, but no signal came to open fire. Johnny Maguire had been told to give the signal with his parabellum when the sixth man passed and, obeying his orders, did not fire when the sixth man did not come.

The Column watched in amazement as the two policemen escaped unharmed. After they had cycled through, someone fired at long range but, needless to say, he missed. From Chapel the Column returned to the Ballydoney area where Tom Kehoe was Captain of the Rathnure Company.

Coming directly as a result of nights without sleep and wearing wet clothes for days, my health was in a bad way and I was very badly run down. At this time, I was attended by the late Dr. Kelly of Killane. During those difficult years, Dr. Kelly had been a great help to the men of the Column. Besides being an outstanding Irishman, he was a remarkable doctor, upholding the highest traditions of the profession. From here, I was obliged to go to the Brideswell area under Captain Kenny. He put me up in Donohoe's of Brideswell. I thought my illness would only last a few days but, when Dr. E.G. Connolly examined me in Brideswell, he told me that was the end of my active service and, if I wanted my health to improve, I would have to stay put.

I was moved from Brideswell to Nolan's of Bolinrush. My health was deteriorating and I was compelled to remain there for nearly two months until the Truce in July, 1921. Here, I was also attended by Dr. Connolly who now lives in Gorey. The Nolan family treated me with the greatest care and hospitality, and they can never be thanked enough for attending me during my illness and for the great service they rendered to the national cause. Were it not for those good people and Dr. Connolly, I would have been dead within a very short time.

While I was convalescing in the 4th Battalion area, I was called upon to collect a fine from Mick Sinnott of

Carnew who had been fined by the Republican courts. Accompanied by Tommy Kenny and Mick Deegan (R.I.P.), I went into the town of Carnew in broad daylight. We created a sensation, for the other two were masked and I carried a revolver in my holster. We walked up and down the street several times but were unable to locate Mick Sinnott, so we decided to call on his brother, Johnny, who owned a hotel. I was small and very light at the time, so Johnny decided to take the revolver from me and I nearly shot him in the process, but he did not succeed in getting the pistol.

After that incident, the I.R.A. decided to boycott the premises of Johnny Sinnott and they guarded it night and day for months.

Then, on 11th July, 1921, the Truce was signed between Ireland and England and fighting ceased, and all the members of the Column returned home. I, of course, went back to my native Enniscorthy.

After forty years, memory can play extraordinary pranks and become dimmed to such an extent that it is impossible for me to remember the correct details of every incident, large or small, and also the names of people whom I associated with during those days. During the time I was on the run, I met countless people and stopped at many houses for short periods, and, with the passing of years, their names have accidentally faded from my memory, for you know that the human machine grows old too. Consequently, it is possible that I have omitted many names which I should have

mentioned and, in some instances, have not got the facts in the proper sequence in which they occurred. Such errors or mistakes are unintentional.

During the years from 1916 to 1921, I was in the full flush of youth, was carefree and gay, and my memory did not accumulate the facts and names as clearly as an older individual might have done. To those whose names I have inadvertently omitted, I tender my humblest apologies.

SIGNED: Thomas Dwyer
(Thomas Dwyer)

DATE: 20th June 1955.

WITNESS: Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col
(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.

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