

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILITÁ 1913-21

No. W.S. 1259

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,259.....

Witness

Sean Fitzpatrick,  
89 Greenlea Road,  
Terenure,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Adjutant to Column, 3rd (South)  
Tipperary Brigade;

Divisional Liaison Officer.

Subject.

Third (South) Tipperary Brigade,  
1913-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF MR. SEÁN FITZPATRICK,  
89 Greenlea Road, Terenure, Dublin.

Brigade Adjutant, 3rd (South) Tipperary Brigade.  
(Liaison Officer, 3rd Southern Division.)  
Later, Divisional Adjutant and O/C, Midland Division.

My father was concerned in the Plan of Campaign in Tipperary town. I think he got a term in jail for his activities in that connection. I cannot say whether or not that had any bearing on whatever national sentiments his three sons grew up with. He was born in Hollyford. My mother (maiden name, Ward) came from near Pallaskenry in West Limerick.

I had been connected with the Gaelic League from as early as I can remember. Tadhg Kelly, a Kerryman, was our Irish teacher. He was a national school teacher in Donaskeagh and taught Irish classes at night in the technical school attached to the Convent of Mercy, *Tipperary town*.

There was a group of us young people from in and around Tipperary town who were nationally minded, with the separatist outlook. This group included Seán Allen (executed in Cork jail, 28th February, 1921). Jack MacCarthy, Con and Jim Moloney, Maurice Crowe, Dinny Lacey, Willie Benn, Seán Treacy, Dan Breen, Artie and Matt Barlow, Paddy and Con Power, Paddy Deere, Tadhg Crowe and Brian Shanahan were also in the group. Jim O'Connell, leader of the C.J. Kickham brass and reed band, which turned out on every occasion of national celebration, was another. Eamon Ó Duibhir of Knockavilla parish, Paddy Dwyer of Hollyford, Pierce

McCann of Cashel and others were active in various parts of the county. We were also associated with Father Matt Ryan of Knockavilla, that grand old priest of the Land War, in processions, aeriochts, lectures, public meetings, etc. All this brought us prominently under the notice of the local Royal Irish Constabulary.

In Tipperary town the Volunteers were started when Seán MacDermott, I.R.B. organiser, came there and addressed an overflow recruiting meeting in the Tivoli Cinema in November, 1913. This meeting was organised by the local I.R.B. group. Large numbers joined the Volunteers and there followed such activities as drilling, parades and display of arms. As a result, the independence movement gained impetus and spread through the county. In the subsequent course of political events, the Irish Volunteer organisation proved to be the decisive factor, though, for a while during the 1914-1918 World War, the organisation was split as a result of an attempt to induce the men to "fight for small nations" (abroad, of course) and "the sanctity of treaties" - moryah! At the time (1914-1915) there were approximately five thousand Volunteers enrolled in South Tipperary alone.

After Redmond's recruiting speech for the British army at Woodenbridge, the Volunteers split in two; the followers of the I.R.B. ideal formed themselves into the Irish Volunteers, while the followers of Redmond became known as the National Volunteers, or, colloquially, the Redmondite Volunteers. Because of the great influence of their leaders, the Redmondite Volunteers drew a greater number of adherents. Behind the Redmondites in Tipperary were the local Hibernians, the Town Clerk (Thomas Dawson), the local M.P. (John Cullinane) and the

majority of the clergy.

To the best of my recollection, it was in 1917 or early 1918 that I joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood. I was sworn in by Seán O'Duffy at Jack MacCarthy's. (Seán O'Duffy was later our first elected Battalion O/C. He was ~~later~~ killed in action in 1920.) At this time, Seán O'Duffy was the local Centre for the I.R.B.

The Insurrection of Easter Week, 1916, had for its declared object the assertion in arms of Ireland's right to independence. It is but true to say that the Insurrection was the work of a comparatively small body of men and hardly spread outside Dublin. The blame, if such there be, for the absence of simultaneous action in the country generally must, in some measure, be attributed to divided counsels amongst the leaders in Dublin. Owing to the confusion of orders and counter orders, the Volunteer organisation in Tipperary, for example, was in a bewildered state; consequently, so far as that part of the country was concerned, there was not that co-ordinated effort which might otherwise have been expected. Some of the companies in the area did mobilise but did not actually go into action, other than cutting telephone wires and blocking roads and railway lines. One incident did occur, however, at Monour, near Tipperary town, when two R.I.C. were shot dead in their attempt to arrest Michael O'Callaghan. It is hardly necessary to say that the amount of arms and equipment the Volunteers possessed at the time was decidedly limited.

Immediately following the Insurrection, the principal leaders were executed by the British, and thousands of Volunteers were arrested and deported to

English internment camps and jails. However, the work of organising proceeded with a new vigour and, in 1917, regular companies and battalions were formed in South Tipperary, mainly through the efforts of Seán Treacy, Dan Breen, Seamas Robinson, Maurice Crowe, Con Moloney, the Barlow's of Shrough and others, to whom must go the credit of establishing the 3rd Tipperary Brigade.

In 1918, the Brigade was fairly well organised, though still poorly equipped. It consisted of six Battalions (Rosegreen, Fethard and Carrick-on-Suir were formed later), made up of fifty-seven Companies, and comprised a total of roughly four thousand men. Seamas Robinson (who had taken part in the 1916 fight in Dublin) was appointed as the Brigade's first O/C. There was much activity by way of arms raids and purchases, parades, drill instruction, etc. In private houses in the area, there was plenty of shotguns, an occasional revolver, bayonet or rifle of one kind or other. The Volunteers in their respective districts had compiled exact information regarding houses where such weapons were, and experienced little or no difficulty in collecting these badly-needed articles. In Tipperary town, Redmond's National Volunteers were dispossessed of a quantity of more or less serviceable rifles of the Martini type. There were other sources of supply also, but these were known only to certain of the Brigade Staff who had established contact with friends in Dublin and elsewhere.

A fairly efficient intelligence service was developed and a feature of activity at this time was: reconnoitring enemy posts, intercepting military despatches, plans, etc., and sham battles - notably that of Tipperary town, part of which the Volunteers had

proclaimed a military area for the particular occasion. No doubt, the then British garrison there, numbering over three thousand troops, considered such action on our part "damn cheek - playing at soldiers", but we were indifferent to their reactions.

During the Conscription scare (1918), the Volunteer organisation in Tipperary swelled to enormous proportions - young men and old flocked to its ranks. When the threat of the press gang faded away, so, too, did our newly-fledged recruits, but those who remained steadfast were of the right calibre.

The system of guerilla tactics, with which we became so familiar afterwards, may be said to have been ushered in with the ambush of a police escort at Sologheadbeg on January 21st, 1919. Four of the Brigade officers - Sean Treacy, Dan Breen, Seamus Robinson, Seán Hogan - and four other Volunteers (Tadhg Crowe, Mick Ryan, Pat McCormack and Paddy O'Dwyer) comprised the attacking party. This skirmish resulted in the deaths of two R.I.C. men and the capture of their rifles, ammunition and a quantity of gelignite which the police had been escorting to the quarry at the place of ambush. Martial law was proclaimed in South Tipperary as a direct consequence of this affray - incidentally, martial law conditions remained in force there right up to the Truce (11th July, 1921), and even after that date. British military reinforcements were drafted into the area and fairs, markets and public meetings were prohibited. But - and this is most important - Irishmen, who had clashed with English law to the extent of taking enemy lives, decided, for the first time in a century, not to leave the country, not to stand their

trial, in the hope of transportation rather than death, not to end their rebellious careers, but rather to regard this event as a beginning and a baptism of fire; to stay in the country of their birth and to rely on the plain people to keep them safe. Thus was substituted the guerilla method for the "rising-out." Thus, in fact, began the Black and Tan war.

Next in sequence after Sologheadbeg came the famous Knocklong rescue - on the evening of May 13th, 1919 - in which the four Brigade officers already mentioned took part, actively supported by members of the Galtee Battalion (Galbally) - Eamon O'Brien and his brother (John Joe), Sean Lynch, Jim Scanlon, Ned Foley and others. Seán Hogan - he was only about eighteen years of age at the time - had been captured by R.I.C. on the morning of the previous day, May 12th, at Meagher's of Annfield, following a dance the night before at Eamon O'Dwyer's of Ballagh; he was taken as prisoner to Thurles whence he was being brought by train to Cork under armed escort of four police. Sean Treacy and Eamon O'Brien played major parts in the actual rescue. Two of the police escort were killed and one wounded; four of the rescue party were wounded - Breen and Treacy rather badly - but they had the satisfaction of knowing that their young comrade was safely with them once more. An intensive search by enemy forces followed this incident and the rescuers had many narrow escapes from capture.

I had served my time in the printing works of the 'Tipperary People' (later 'The Tipperaryman'), owned by the McCormack family, who were friendly to the national movement. Whilst employed there, I had a visit from the R.I.C. (in September or October, 1919) who served me

with an expulsion order: to reside outside Munster. As I did not feel like obliging them, I went "on the run", to the districts of Kilross and Lackelly, some five or six miles west of Tipperary town. I stayed mostly with friends - the Hartnett's, Kilross, and the Moloney's, Lackelly. (Incidentally, it was in this latter house that Robinson, Treacy and Breen stayed the night before the rescue of Seán Hogan at Knocklong - May 13th, 1919.) At that time, the enemy were very active and we had to have continuous outposts of Volunteers at Galbally and Ballylanders, especially at O'Brien's (Galbally) and Foley's (Ballylanders).

Maurice Crowe, Jack O'Meara and I were staying in Moloney's, Lackelly, in January or February, 1920. The house was surrounded in the early hours of the morning and the three of us were arrested and lodged in Cork jail. Commandant Fitzgerald and others were on hunger-strike in the hospital there at the time. I was appointed O/C of the prisoners' wing and, as such, conducted negotiations with the prison censor. We had the usual sing-songs and broke all the rules and regulations we could.

In April or May, 1920, the three of us were tried by British court martial, General Strickland presiding. We denied the right of the court to have any jurisdiction over us. I was sentenced to six months' imprisonment which I served in Kilkenny jail. Noel Lemass was one of the group of prisoners in Kilkenny. He had artistic leanings and favoured me with a pencil drawing of my patrician(!) features. This was one of my treasured possessions until the Tans, in a raid on my home, destroyed it. I was again appointed O/C, Prisoners, and

once more conducted negotiations with ~~an~~<sup>my</sup> old acquaintance, the prison censor, a friendly person, who had been transferred from Cork.

On my release about September, 1920, I returned to Tipperary town and sought the whereabouts of Lacey's column which was then only partially formed. I caught up with the column on the day of the Thomastown ambush, October 28th, 1920.

Throughout the period 1919-1920, there had been intense training, field manoeuvres, officers' classes, arms raids, etc., the Brigade staff and many of the Battalion officers being on whole-time service. A Republican police force was also organised. The enemy garrisons throughout the area were augmented in pursuance of a campaign against the various Departments then functioning under the authority of Dáil Éireann.

There was continuous activity on our part, police barracks being attacked in almost every district, in some cases successfully, such as, Ballylanders (February, 1920) and Kilmallock (May, 1920), one of the fiercest engagements of the time, in which men from the Tipperary and East Limerick Brigades took part, the attack lasting about five hours. The R.I.C. posts at Doon, Drangan, Cappawhite, Hollyford, Rear Cross, Clonoulty, Lisronagh and many others were likewise assailed, the garrisons, in some instances, being forced to evacuate and their barracks burned down. The British rifle ranges at Tipperary and Rehill were also destroyed. A fuller account of these barrack attacks will be found in Ernie O'Malley's book, 'On Another Man's Wound'.

Another feature of our activity was the holding up of trains and mail cars for the purpose of intercepting letters in course of post. Much valuable information was obtained in this way, and the British military were forced to employ special escorts to prevent their despatches falling into our hands. One of these escorts was ambushed near Oola, a few miles from Limerick Junction. Our men, who were armed with assorted weapons, for which they had but a very limited supply of ammunition, were forced to retire on the arrival of enemy reinforcements, though not before they had inflicted some casualties. In this attack, in which Seán Treacy played a prominent part, the Martini rifles - those taken from Redmond's supporters - were used for the first time. They proved almost useless as, when fired from, it was found that the bullet cases could not easily be extracted from the magazines. In fact, they were more of a danger to our own men than the enemy. It transpired later that Brigadier-General Lucas was actually one of the party attacked. This British officer, with Colonels Danford and Tyrell, had been captured by Liam Lynch and a few of his staff some weeks previously, but the night before the Oola ambush he succeeded in eluding his guard.

About this time, the enemy seemed to be concentrating his forces on the southern counties. For strategic reasons, presumably, our Brigade area (South Tipperary) was one of the most heavily garrisoned parts of the country, and there were large forces of British military in Tipperary town, Cahir, Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Clogheen and Fethard, with hundreds of R.I.C. units stationed at places from five to eight miles apart - a veritable network of posts.

In August, 1920, a Brigade Council meeting at Blackcastle, near Roségreen, was interrupted by a large party of mounted Lancers from Cahir. To dodge the cavalry, some novel methods of escape were resorted to. One Brigade officer actually dived into a shallow, but rather dirty pond, keeping his mouth just out of the water, and over that he managed to place some of the weeds with which the pond was besprinkled. The others escaped as best they could, keeping the pursuing Lancers at bay by occasional shots.

Later, the four principal Brigade officers, already mentioned, were active in Dublin and took part in practically all the engagements there - notably the attack on Lord French at Ashtown. Of these officers, there was one - Seán Allis Treacy - whose name and fame will never be forgotten in Tipperary. He was killed in action in Talbot Street, Dublin on October 14th, 1920, just eleven days before his intended wedding and two days after the epic fight at "Fernside", Drumcondra, Dublin, in which he and Dan Breen got away out of a death trap when attacked by British armed forces, including some high-ranking Intelligence officers from Dublin Castle.

Coincident with Treacy's death, the Battalion active service ~~units~~<sup>part</sup> were formed into Brigade columns and engaged in blocking roads, raiding mails and harassing the enemy at every opportunity. The first Brigade column - afterwards known as the No. 1 Brigade Column - was formed in September or October, 1920. It consisted of about fifty or sixty men, drawn principally from the 4th Battalion area (Tipperary town and district). Dinny Lacy was appointed as its O/C. Appreciating his temperament, it naturally followed that more hazardous

operations would have to be undertaken to secure arms and ammunition. Consequently, an engagement of a serious nature took place at Thomastown, on the Tipperary-Cashel road, when a lorry-load of British troops, en route to Tipperary for musketry practice, were ambushed from behind broken walls. This fight lasted about an hour, five or six soldiers being killed and several wounded. The arrival of enemy reinforcements forced our men to retire, with only one man wounded - and he is still alive and kicking!

The Thomastown incident was remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, the coolness and bravery of the British officer in charge. When fire was first opened on his party, he scrambled out of his lorry on to the roadway and walked around it, taking pot shots with his revolver at our men as they ventured to expose themselves. He was struck several times - pieces of his tunic were cut away and were seen to flutter to the ground. The explanation was simple, as we learned afterwards - he wore chain armour under his uniform, but he died of shock later. Secondly, the seeming recklessness of some of our men, in particular, Jim Gorman from around Hollyford, who took advantage of a lull in the shooting to come out from his ambush position and lie down flat in a slight dip in the road, facing the enemy at whom he blazed away to his heart's content. But Jim was an old campaigner, having learned the hard way in the first world war.

A tribute must here be paid to that great old Irish-Irelander, Father Matt Ryan of Knockavilla, who happened to be saying Mass in the neighbourhood at the time. Hearing the shooting, he rushed towards the scene, full of anxiety lest any of "the boys" should be

wounded and need his spiritual aid.

My brother, Michael, was wounded during the fight at Thomastown. He was removed to Chris Barron's house in Kilmoyler. Arrangements were made for his removal to a Limerick hospital for operation and treatment. For this purpose, a motor car was hired in Tipperary town. I accompanied my brother along devious routes until we came to Pallas, on the main Limerick road. It was raining heavily at the time and the night was very dark. At Pallas we were surprised by a ~~suicidal~~<sup>British</sup> road block on the main road. When challenged, we halted. A sentry approached, rifle at the ready. As he looked pretty youngish and miserable in the rain, I expressed sympathy with him, offered him a cigarette and, in order to distract him from seeing the wounded man beside me in the rear of the car, I struck a match to light the cigarette. He seemed to appreciate my, apparently, friendly gesture, for he almost immediately said, "O.K., chum! On your way!" Michael was, all this time, bleeding profusely. We proceeded to a Limerick city hospital, the name ~~at~~ ~~whereabouts~~ of which I cannot remember. All I can recollect is that nuns were in charge of it. I returned to Tipperary with the driver and subsequently rejoined the Column.

Shortly afterwards, we discovered that the car driver was an ex-British army man, who did not keep his mouth shut about the strange cargo he had brought to the hospital in Limerick. The result was that, within twenty-four hours, the hospital was raided by Tans from Limerick city, but the nuns and nurses secretly removed the wounded man from room to room, thereby effectively concealing him. A surgical operation was eventually

performed and it was discovered that the bullet, which had entered the thigh, had travelled down to the knee.

The next successful Column operation was an ambush staged at Lisnagaul in the Glen of Aherlow, about mid-November, 1920. It was learned that a party of nine R.I.C. and Tans were accustomed to travel on a Crossley tender between Galbally, Bansha and Tipperary. Fire was opened on them as the tender rounded a bend of the road. The driver being shot dead, the car ran against the fence. After half-an-hour's fighting, the police were overcome, four being killed outright and a similar number seriously wounded; the ninth one managed to get away. Their guns and equipment were captured and their car set on fire. As it burst into flames, these spread to the petrol that had leaked on to the road from the punctured tank. It happened that one of the wounded police lay on the track of the petrol and he would have been burned alive if two of the Column, at great risk to themselves, had not removed him from the path of the flames in the nick of time. The sequel to this ambush was the burning by the Tans of a nearby house and of several houses in Tipperary town.

We made a number of attempts to ambush military and police in Tipperary town and we had executions of spies. About Christmas, 1920, the Column was billeted in the Grantstown area when its members separated for "holidays", with instructions to keep in touch with each other, in the knowledge that all would be called together again.

Towards the end of 1920 a total of twelve of our men had been killed.

Early in January, 1921, the Column reassembled in sections near Donohill. One day, whilst waiting for our Confessions to be heard in a friendly farmer's house, the lads were tricking with a .38 revolver, and Sparkie Breen, thinking it was unloaded, put the muzzle to the palm of his own hand and pulled the trigger. He got a rude awakening, however, when he found that a bullet from the gun had broken a bone in his hand.

It was still early in January, 1921, when Lacey and three others, who were staying at a friend's house at Seskin, near Sologhead, were surprised by a large party of R.I.C. and Tans on a raiding expedition. Lacey and his men rushed out and were immediately fired on. They had a miraculous escape. Though under continuous fire, they used their guns to such good effect that they succeeded in getting out of range. It required courage and presence of mind to accomplish such a dash for liberty, but these qualities Dinny Lacey and his comrades possessed to a high degree.

The Column shortly afterwards proceeded towards Kilcommon with a view to attacking the R.I.C. barracks there. This attack was not as successful as we had hoped, but I, at least, have vivid memories of extricating myself from bog-holes when night-marching in that district.

In between scraps, there were other experiences, some funny, which I may as well relate here. On the second day following the Glen ambush, the Column, after a forced march, were billeted around Donohill and Aleen. It was the job of the local Company Captains to provide scouts for the night, to guard against surprise. As it

happened, they were very much on the alert, but Lacey would not be content until he had personally inspected the several outposts. It was my job to accompany him on his rounds. On this occasion, everything was just as it should be. The night was pitch dark, and we were making our way to our own billet when we were startled on hearing stealthy movements ahead of us, near Aleen cross-roads. We dropped flat on the grass margin beside the road, our guns ready for emergencies, and waited in suspense as the movements became more audible. Lacey cried, "Halt", and again, "Halt, hands up", as the seeming sound of footsteps came nearer. Taking no chances and his final shout of "Halt, or I'll shoot", passing unheeded, Lacey fired. The noise ceased. We then crept forward on hands and knees, only to discover that a poor old ass, which had been grazing by the roadside, had been shot! Lacey was very sorry, but, when, in his hearing, I mentioned the incident to the boys, Dinny, in his annoyance, retorted, "Why didn't the beggar hee-haw or put his hands up!"

Another incident I recall was of a night in the Glen of Aherlow. The Column had made its way over the Slievenamuck hills to a place about midway between Galbally and Lisvernane. It was raining "cats and dogs" - we ourselves were like drowned rats. The Aherlow river was in flood, but had to be crossed. Having got safely across, we made our way to friendly houses. The usual precautions were taken against surprise. Our section, including Lacey and a big, bulky six-footer whom I shall call "A", also a five-footer whom we called "Sparkie", agus mise, got into a farmer's house just off the road. A roaring fire

of logs was got going in the kitchen where we divested ourselves of our dripping clothes. Sugar chairs were ranged round the fire and on these we hung our coats, breeches, etc., to dry. We kept our guns handy, just in case, and went to bed by the light of the fire. A few hours later, we were awakened by one of the scouts who reported that an enemy patrol had moved out from Galbally in our direction. Though only half awake, we jumped out of bed and made for our clothes. The log fire had sunk low and it was quite dark. We hurriedly snatched up our clothes, struggled into them - they were only partly dried - and took up positions outside the house as quickly as possible. After half-an-hour's wait, our scouts reported that the patrol had returned to its base, and it was only then we ventured to throw some light on the scene. Somehow or other, a six-footer "A" had got into five-footer Sparkie's breeches and the garment had suffered woefully in the process. All the stitching had burst and the legs hung in tatters from his ample girth! Sparkie, too, had enveloped his limbs in "A's" voluminous pants. In fact, he had to stuff the tail ends of both his coat and overcoat inside the waistband in order to keep the pants attached to his person!

Then there is the story of the two elderly brothers who extended hospitality to about a dozen of the Column one night. The place shall be nameless. Anyway, as we sat around the kitchen, swapping yarns, we could not but admire its spotless condition - the table scrubbed clean, the dresser filled with shining crockery. Even the floor was such that one could almost eat off it, and the bright, cheerful fire of "scraws" was a welcome sight to weary men. The

brothers did all the housework themselves. There was no woman in the house that I could see - maybe she was out "coorting" or just ag cuardfocht - and I was intrigued watching one of the brothers set about baking a cake in honour of our visit. He had the habit of chewing tobacco, and every so often, with machine-like precision, he squirted the juice into the fire. Only once did he misfire, and that was when he indulged in a fit of laughter at one of the yarns. It was a fascinating sight to see his abdomen - polite word, that - wobbling up and down like a jelly. He was so convulsed as to be completely unaware that the 'baccy quid he had been chewing had "slipped its anchor" and had landed in the dough. He proceeded with his dough-mixing, absolutely unconscious that anything unusual had happened. The other brother "wet the tay" and laid the table, and when the cake - one of those large, flat ones - was baked, cut up and handed round, with lashings of fresh farmer's butter, I made very sure that my piece was free from "foreign bodies"!

Later, en route to Carrick-on Suir, the Column engaged the R.I.C. post at Glenbower where two of the garrison were badly wounded. At Carrick the Column succeeded in taking up vantage points in the town, with the intention of attacking the police patrol. The town was crowded with people on the particular night, and, though we waited three hours, it was not found possible, without endangering their lives, to carry out the attack as planned. Preparations were next made to ambush a troop train at Golden Garden, between Dundrum and Limerick Junction. Though our men had taken up positions, this attack did not come off,

either through some mis-information, or forewarning to the enemy who did not travel as expected. In fact, the number of plans laid and attacks carried out, over a period of about three months, was close on twenty. The Column was continuously on the move, and the intervals between each "scrap" were spent in training and strengthening the organisation in the Company districts we visited. A second Column, under Seán Hogan of Knocklong fame, was formed. It operated mostly in the area stretching between the Galtees and the Knockmealdowns, towards the Comeraghs.

In March, 1921, there was an encounter with enemy troops at Ballinamarsough, near Tipperary, where two of our men were killed and two wounded. At Coach road, between Tipperary town and the Glen of Aherlow, an ambush was being prepared. As our men were being placed in position, a detachment of the Yorkshire Light Infantry from the town came on the scene and made an effort to surround the Column. This encircling movement failed and our men got through, after half-an-hour's fighting. Another scrap took place at Ballinahow, near Tipperary, the honours being with the Column on this occasion.

In April, 1921, a party of British troops, escorting a food convoy was attacked by the combined Lacy and Hogan Columns at Garrymore, near Clogheen. One soldier was killed, two were wounded and the remainder disarmed. The convoy was destroyed. The sequel to this fight was the capture of District Inspector Potter, a police officer of some importance. He was in mufti at the time, <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ a search of his papers revealed his identity. The Columns were

marching off with their prisoner and booty when they encountered a second and larger party of enemy troops who opened fire from a Lewis machine-gun. Although outnumbered, our men not only fought their way through but carried D.I. Potter with them. At this time, an I.R.A. man, named Traynor, was under sentence of death in Dublin. In an effort to save his life, an offer to release Potter was made to the British Headquarters in the city, but those in charge there seemed incapable of appreciating even one act of chivalry in return for another. The spirit of vengeance and blood-lust, with ~~with~~ <sup>which</sup> British policy was imbued, sent poor Traynor to his doom, leaving Potter to suffer a like fate a few days later. Ten farmhouses in South Tipperary were blown up as an official reprisal for his execution.

About March, 1921, I was called to Brigade Headquarters to replace Con Moloney as Brigade Adjutant. Brigade Headquarters was in Davin's of Rathsallagh, near Rosegreen. I was accompanied on the way by Jim Doherty, a member of the Column. We reached the village of Killeenasteena and slept in a house there that night. Next morning (Sunday), we were awakened by the people of the house on their return from Mass. They were greatly agitated and told us that the village had been raided earlier that morning by British troops from Cahir, and that Paddy Hogan, O/C, Cashel Battalion, had been killed in a lone fight against great odds. As the shooting had occurred at the end of the village furthest from us, neither Doherty nor I had heard it. We proceeded to Brigade Headquarters and arrived there that evening.

The Davin family at Rathsallagh were unique in their

assistance to the Volunteers. The whole family, including the father and mother, did trojan work in the fight for freedom. Their house was Battalion, Brigade and later Divisional Headquarters. A dug-out, named "71" (after a certain house in Dublin south suburbs bearing that number), was constructed on their land. The approaches to it were ingeniously concealed - and it was in it that most of the Brigade executive work was done. It was also used as sleeping quarters and, as occasion arose, it housed Brigade and Divisional officers.

In May, 1921, it was decided to split the two major Columns into Battalion active service units, as both had become too big and unwieldy in the conditions then prevailing. The active service units were more mobile and operated in their own Battalion areas, sniping lorries and barracks and generally worrying the garrisons, so much so that the enemy deemed it advisable to move in large bodies along the main roads only. Three British officers of the Fethard garrison, who were on reconnaissance work in the vicinity of our Brigade Headquarters (in the Rathsallagh-Milltown area) were captured, court martialled and shot - within forty-eight hours! Following this incident, there was feverish enemy activity. Armed search parties, with bloodhounds, scoured the district and continued on the job until the bodies were found. One of these parties camped overnight in a corner of a field, not twenty yards from our Headquarters - a dug-out, by the way - the occupants of which were blissfully unaware of the fact until told about it

the following morning, by which time the party had taken its departure! At Bansha two Tans were killed and another wounded. A military policeman was fired on and wounded at Limerick Junction. There was an ambush at Boherdota in which two police were killed and three wounded, and again at Thomastown when a lorry-load of British military were fired on and several wounded. About this time also, the various Brigades throughout the country were being grouped into Divisions and an elaborate system of dug-outs was in vogue. The 3rd Tipperary Brigade came under the 2nd Southern Command, and a number of its officers were appointed to the Divisional Staff.

Immediately prior to the Truce (11th July, 1921), our Brigade numbered nearly 3,500 men, of whom about 350 were on whole-time active service, with a further 250 in various jails. A rough estimate of arms in the Brigade area at the time would be: 100 Lee Enfield rifles: 200 Martini's (single shot): a dozen or so Winchester and other sporting rifles: an assortment of revolvers (.45's and automatics): shotguns: and one Hotchkiss machine gun (practically dud).

During the Truce period, training camps for picked men were established in the Brigade area. The Divisional camp, supervised by Ernie O'Malley, was set up at Galtee Castle, near Skeheenarinka, the Brigade camp at Ballinard Castle, between Fethard and Cloneen, being entrusted to yours truly. The specialised instruction in military tactics imparted at these training centres enabled the officers attending them to start camps on similar lines in their respective Battalion areas.

When the Truce came in July, 1921, we had great celebrations. I was appointed Liaison Officer, with headquarters in Clonmel. My job was made a little more difficult by the lawless(?) outlook and activities of the I.R.A. in South Tipperary, which added spice to the battle of wits between my opposite number and me in Clonmel.

There was a big raid on the military hutments near Tipperary town about November, 1921, when ~~about~~<sup>Some</sup> thirty rifles, a machine gun and a quantity of ammunition were "acquired" by the I.R.A. Frank Thornton was sent from Dublin to inquire into the raid. He and I accompanied the O/C of the British troops over the locale of the raid. The British officer pointed out the place where the raiders entered the hutments, where they had cut the surrounding barbed wire, and also traced their movements to a nearby house, "Arravale", owned by John Moloney. In the rather soggy ground outside the house could be seen the tyre-imprints of the motor car which had been used to take away the booty. The imprints showed that there were four distinct and different tyres on the car, registering a first-class clue. For the purpose of the Inquiry, Thornton summoned the local Commandant and officers to meet him in a house at Shrough, about three miles west of the town. Thornton and I accepted the offer of a car from the local Volunteers to take us from the Royal Hotel, Tipperary, to the meeting place. On the road to Shrough the car broke down. While the driver was tinkering with something under the bonnet of the car Thornton alighted and walked up and down the road. The break-down was a ruse to delay Thornton's arrival until Con Moloney had time to tutor the men in their evidence for the Inquiry. When the

car was ready to start Thornton took a close look at the wheels and he must have noticed the four different tyres, the treads of which corresponded with the imprints outside John Moloney's house, previously mentioned. He probably guessed that the local I.R.A. had no other car at their disposal. I do not need to say what was the outcome of the Inquiry, nor need I add that the booty was never returned to its original owners.

About this time, Paddy Dalton was appointed O/C of the 5th (Clonmel) Battalion. Some three days before Clonmel military barracks was to be taken over a representative of the Provisional Government arrived in Clonmel to take an inventory of the material ~~to be handed over~~ <sup>there</sup> and to receive the key of the barracks when the British garrison were evacuating it. In my capacity as Liaison Officer I was duly advised of this. I thought it no harm(?) to convey this information to Paddy Dalton. The inventory having been completed, the day came when the British troops were to march out and the ceremony of handing over the key was to take place. For the latter purpose the Provisional Government's representative took up a conspicuous position outside the barracks gate. Paddy Dalton was very much in evidence there also at the head of an imposing parade <sup>of his men.</sup> As the British troops ~~left~~ <sup>marched out</sup> Paddy gave the command: "'Shun! Eyes right!", and smartly saluted the British O/C. The officer seemed surprised and pleased at the discipline and efficiency of the I.R.A. and recognised the courtesy by returning the salute. He then handed over the key to the Provisional Government's representative and marched away with his troops. Paddy immediately ordered the said representative to give the key to him; the latter,

deeming discretion the better part of valour, complied, and he was then quietly but firmly told that, if he had any regard for his health, he had better "skedaddle" from South Tipperary as quickly as possible.

The I.R.A. decided to celebrate the occupation of Clonmel military barracks by holding a dance there on a certain Sunday night. This was used as a cover for planning a raid on the local R.I.C. barracks. At this time the R.I.C. and Tans in the South Riding of Tipperary were practically all concentrated in Clonmel with their arms, ammunition and equipment. Friendly police contacts had given the I.R.A. all the necessary information to gain entrance to the barrack at the most opportune moment. At about 11 p.m. fifteen I.R.A. men, with Dinny Lacey, Vice-Commandant, in charge, proceeded from the military barracks in single file by a back street. At this time each night, the whole of the R.I.C.'s augmented garrison were crowded into the large dayroom for roll-call. The signal required to get the door opened was a special knock. After the knock, the usual procedure was for the constable on duty to partially open the door, peer our and enquire as to who was there. When the knock was given by the I.R.A., the door was opened as usual, but the constable had scarcely made his enquiry when the I.R.A. pressed the door fully open and jammed the man against the wall. While he was in this predicament he was deprived of his revolver. The main body of the raiders then rushed into the hallway. A door on the right of the hall opened on the dayroom in which were packed about seventy of the garrison, all unarmed, and mostly in déshabillé, preparatory to going to bed. There was no escape from

the room. The windows, which were barred to keep others out, helped to keep the police in. It needed only two I.R.A. men, armed with revolvers, to man the doorway and see to it that the ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> "prisoners" behaved themselves whilst the remainder of the raiding party went about their job. At least one of the prisoners - the sergeant who had acted as courier between the R.I.C. divisional inspector and me during my *Liaison* activities - was apparently shocked and surprised at seeing the *Liaison Officer*. His reaction was to grab the telephone, seemingly to summon help. No effort was made to stop him, and he looked more than just disappointed when the post office official blandly informed him, "Sorry, sir, but the lines are engaged!" The others had the sense to realise that they had been neatly trapped and that any resistance on their part would be foolish. Only a single, accidental shot was fired during the whole affair, which lasted into the early hours of the following morning. The booty on this occasion consisted of hundreds of service rifles and revolvers, six Lewis guns, a very large quantity of ammunition and hand grenades, also Crossley tenders and two armoured cars, equipment of various kinds, as well as important documents. The element of surprise was the key to the success of the Clonmel raid, coupled with good intelligence work, careful planning and not a little daring. My resignation as *Liaison Officer* inevitably followed.

At the outbreak of the Civil War the 3rd Tipperary Brigade numbered approximately 3,000 men, of whom nearly half were on whole-time duty. From the point of view of men and material, it was one of the strongest units in the whole country. Most of the "material", however, was "acquired" in the two major raids, already described.

It is not my intention to go into the merits or otherwise of the Civil War, and I will conclude this statement with a summary of some of the activities in which the 3rd Tipperary Brigade units took part during that tragic period in our history. A Column (Mick Sheehan i/c.) left Clonmel for Dublin. It did not enter the city, but took part in the operations in the Blessington area, having en route taken the barracks at Enniscorthy, Ferns and Baltinglass. Another Column (Dinny Lacey i/c.) advanced on Kilkenny, taking Urlingford barracks on the way. On going to the relief of Republican forces at Templemore, Dacey's Column was surprised and came under fire at Longford Pass, at a bleak spot known locally as "Mary Willies", and suffered some casualties. What was called "line" fighting developed later. In the 2nd Southern Divisional area the Republican forces occupied strategic points between Waterford, Clonmel, Cahir, Cashel and Tipperary. Two of our men were killed in an attack at Golden. Three others were blown up when a mine exploded on the outskirts of Tipperary town. Republican Columns were sent to the relief of Waterford, but they could do nothing effective as the bridge had not been destroyed by the Waterford Volunteers, and our men were forced to retire. These Columns were subsequently engaged in the defence of Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel, Cahir and Tipperary. The numerical strength and superior equipment of the opposing forces was such that the Republicans had to evacuate these places, but before doing so they destroyed the barracks in each case to prevent reoccupation. Following these incidents it was decided to return to the old method of guerilla tactics. Battalion A.S.U's were again formed and

there were frequent encounters throughout the Brigade area - at Kilfeacle, Woodroffe, Grantstown, Bawndonnel, Grange, Ballingarry and many others.

If I select two of these engagements for special mention it is not because the others were of no consequence. One was a successful attack on an armoured turret car containing a Lewis machine-gun and crew which the opposing forces ran on the railway between Clonmel, Fethard and Thurles. It was nicknamed the "Grey Ghost" on account of the noiseless and camouflaged way in which it moved along the rails. Our Intelligence service having furnished fairly accurate information regarding the "Grey Ghost's" schedule, our men took up prepared positions on and around one of the road bridges over the line. As the armoured car came underneath the bridge some of the large coping stones of the parapet, which had been previously loosened, were tilted over right on top of the car; at the same time, the occupants were greeted with a fusilade of rifle and revolver shots. The shock was rather too much for the gun-crew. Having been taken by surprise, they surrendered and could hardly be blamed for "giving up the 'Ghost'":

The other incident was the capture by Tipperary and Kilkenny Columns of three posts at Callan, Thomastown and Mullinavat in Co. Kilkenny. These three posts were captured on the same night. The remarkable ease and rapidity with which this feat was accomplished caused the opposing command to re-double his guards and take extra precautions at his larger stations. The booty secured as a result of the operation consisted of a large number of rifles, equipment and ammunition. Lack of contact with our

Divisional Headquarters prevented fuller advantage being taken of the situation at the time.

Our Headquarters staff had again gone "underground" - or rather "overground" - this time in an ingeniously-contrived ~~hide~~ hide-out which was the "brain-child" of the late Bob de Courcy of Limerick, then Divisional Engineer. From the viewpoint of hygiene, it did not exactly conform to the health regulations. In it, however, we managed to produce a weekly bulletin known as "Chun an Lae". I can testify that the conditions under which this bulletin was published would not be tolerated by any self-respecting printer. However, it was a readable sheet and its contents sought to encourage our men in the fight they then waged in defence of the Republic.

Weakened resistance in other areas allowed the opposing High Command to concentrate the bulk of its forces on South Tipperary. Early in 1923 there were sweeping rounds-up, and the people generally began to weary of conditions. The 3rd Tipperary Brigade suffered heavy casualties, but its greatest loss at the time was the death of its commander, Dinny Lacey. On February 18th, 1923, he, with his Vice-Brigadier (Paddy McDonagh) and another, were at a farmhouse in Ballydavid. Hearing shots in the direction of Ashgrove, nearby, and realising that some of the Column lads there were being attacked, Lacey and his companions decided to go to their assistance. As they left the house, they were fired on from behind the farmyard wall. Paddy McDonagh was severely wounded, but all three gained the cover of a ditch, only to find themselves surrounded on every side. Lacey mounted the ditch and was stooping to help his wounded comrade when fire was opened and he

received a fatal wound in the temple. He died almost immediately. McDonagh succumbed to his wounds later. So passed Dinny Lacey - a great fighter and leader of men. Possessed of magnificent courage; daring to the point of rashness, outspoken and determined, yet deeply religious - he was admired by his men and feared by his enemies. The news of his death seemed to have a disintegrating effect on the 3rd Tipperary A.S.U's generally. Shortly before the Cease Fire order (27th April, 1923) only skeleton staffs existed in dug-outs in the different districts. Isolated groups continued the defensive struggle, but eventually the A.S.U's were disbanded.

It is of interest to note that, during the big Hunger Strike (October-November, 1923) - it lasted for thirty-five days, I think - out of the sixty-six men in Newbridge Barracks who took part, twenty-eight were members of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade.

An analysis of the Brigade casualty list shows that four Brigade officers, eleven Battalion officers and sixty-seven Company officers and men gave their lives in the Fight for Irish Freedom. Go ndeanaidh Dia trocaire ar a anamnaibh!

SIGNED: Sean Fitzpatrick  
(Sean Fitzpatrick)  
DATE: 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1955

23rd September, 1955.

WITNESS: Seumas Robinson  
(Seumas Robinson)

