

W. S. 1439

# ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1439

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1439

Witness

James Maguire,  
60, Malahide Road,  
Dublin.

Identity.

Captain, Glenidon Company, Irish Volunteers.  
Brigade Commander, Mullingar Brigade, I.R.A.

Subject.

Activities of Glenidon Company, Irish Volunteers,  
Co. Westmeath. 1914-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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STATEMENT BY JAMES MAGUIRE,

60, Malahide Road, Dublin.

I was born in Glenidan, Co. Westmeath, in the year 1889. I attended the National School in Glenidan and later on in Foré. As far as I know, my education did not contribute to any national feelings I may have had in those early years.

When the Irish Volunteers were organised to counteract Carson's Volunteers in Ulster, I joined the local company in Glenidan which then had a membership of about forty. A British ex soldier named John Keane was in charge of drilling. There were no arms in the company but we used wooden guns for training. The first big parade we had was on the fair green in Mullingar on 15th August, 1914, the day after England had declared war on Germany. I think there were a thousand men parading on the green in Mullingar, and Major Dease and Colonel Moore reviewed us.

When the split in the Volunteers took place as a result of Redmond's speech at Woodenbridge, our whole company fell asunder. They were not going to fight Ulster, they were not going to France, and the whole thing collapsed. Not one man went into the British army from our company after Redmond's speech, although some men from the parish did join.

After a short time, my brother, Tom, and myself and some others - about a dozen in all - formed a company of Volunteers again. We had the same man to drill us. He had been twenty-nine years in the British army and liked drilling. We drilled openly every Sunday evening on the road. The R.I.C. from the local barracks always paid us a visit

and would have long chats with John Keane. The Sergeant used say, "I must go up and visit this little republic", and would have to walk two and a half miles to see us.

While I was inclined to take things as they came, my brother was more wide-awake as to what was happening and felt that we were out of touch with Dublin. Tom and I often talked it over. He had a letter written to the Volunteers, but did not know to whom it should be sent. It was there in his pocket and never posted. That was in 1916. The only contact we had was through Giolla Christ Ó Briain, who was teaching in our Gaelic League classes. We were on the fringe of things, but we were not in them.

When the fighting started in Dublin in 1916, Giolla Christ Ó Briain was in Athboy, and I went to see him there. He told me to go back home and get Bartley Monahan and as many of the Gaelic League crowd as I could. Anyone that had strong national feelings was in the Gaelic League at that time, and even before 1916. Giolla Christ said he would get someone to mobilise us, as there was a man proceeding to Navan, to mobilise some men there, and from there to Kells, and that he would go back through my place, through Crossakiel and Glenidan. I returned to Glenidan and contacted Monahan. All the arms I had were a single barrellled shotgun and two old revolvers, which I had got from an ex land grabber who was given them by the police for his protection. I had five rounds for one and seven rounds for the other. I had got a hundred shotgun cartridges in Oldcastle.

Monahan and myself waited until about three in the morning on the side of the road where we were to meet the mobiliser, and no one came. He was due to be there between twelve and one o'clock. In fact, I don't know if he ever got

to Navan and Kells. Monahan said he would go home. I said I would not go home, but that I would dump the guns in the hedge - the whole lot - and go on to Athboy to see if there was anything doing there. I went to Athboy - I am sure it was Wednesday or Thursday night. When I arrived in the town, there was no one around - everyone was in bed. I stood in the doorway for a while, and then saw Giolla Christ coming out of a doorway. I ran over to him. He asked me had I brought any stuff. I said, "No". He said, "We are going. Would you care to come?". I said, "How can I go without a shotgun or revolver? I left them in the breen". "Good-bye, Seumas", he said, and fifteen or sixteen men went off with him for Dublin on their bikes. I was left standing in the street.

I knew a good few of the group that set off for Dublin. These were <sup>Paddy</sup> ~~Peader~~ O'Growney (a brother of Father O'Growney, the great Gaelic scholar), Seán McGurl, Paddy Carey, Joe Martin and the two Butterfield brothers from Athboy. The party consisted of ten or twelve. Giolla Christ shook hands with me and off he went. I mounted my bike and went home.

Every day, from, say, the Tuesday of the week of the Rising, the Sergeant and a couple of R.I.C. men came to see if my brother and myself were there. The Sergeant said, "I don't want to arrest you and I wouldn't wish to disturb your mother". I said, "You are very considerate". He said, "I could do it. Any persons we suspect, we could arrest them". He came every day to the fields where I was working. He did not arrest me, but saw that I was there, and went away.

After the Rising in 1916, things were completely dead until 1917 when we assembled our Volunteer company again - possibly after the prisoners, or the first batches of them, had been released. My brother, Tom, was very keen to get things going again, and we started to reorganise the Volunteers in our area. The response was very small. About twelve or fourteen members were our limit. At this time, our friend, M.J. Kennedy in Castlepollard had a small company of Fianna Boys, and he used visit our area and helped to put the company on a proper footing. When the proclamation of 1916 was to be read - or part of it - at public meetings, <sup>KENNEDY</sup> Joe read it at an aeriocht at Castlepollard. I learned the art of drilling and training from a military handbook, and drilled the boys myself. There was no organisation - just a few men here and a few men there. We drilled on the roads and out in the fields at night. We did not see much sense in it as we had only just a couple of shotguns. We had a Sinn Féin club and a band, and we turned out at aeriochta, etc. Although it was a Sinn Féin band, its members were not all Volunteers.

During the conscription scare in 1918, the membership of our company increased, overnight, practically to eighty. We carried out drilling, demonstrations and route marches. We made pikes in the area. I had spotted a very good ash tree which had been cut down by the man who had bought it at Carrick, near <sup>ROUGH BAWN</sup> Rathbane. I took the tree to the sawmills and had it sawed into pike handles, two inches square. A local blacksmith - not a member of the Volunteers - made the pike heads for us. Whenever we got the chance, we took the springs from old prams and made pike heads from them. We fitted up thirty in all.

We were in an old barn for over a fortnight doing this work.

In 1919, when the conscription crisis was over, our membership dwindled down to our original twelve or fourteen. We did the best we could, drilling periodically. The only man who was doing organisation work in our area was Joe Kennedy. He was 'on the run' following his reading of the proclamation. He wore a green hat and turned up at unusual places, but when he entered Athlone he was arrested. He was only a month or so in jail, or perhaps he did a month on hunger-strike. Sometime after his release, he told me to attend a battalion meeting in Mullingar. This was prior to the general election.

The meeting was held in the old chapel house in Mullingar, or perhaps it was St. Mary's Hall in Mary St. There was an election that day. There were men from Myvore, Ballynacargy, Kinnefad, and Killucan. As far as I know, it was Kennedy who did most of the organising for that meeting, which was held to elect a Battalion Commandant. Some of those present proposed Ned Whelan, one of two brothers, Ned and Kit, from just outside the town of Mullingar, and others proposed Kennedy. Whelan was elected. This was the Mullingar Battalion and part of the Athlone Brigade. The Commandant of the Brigade, Seumas O'Meara, was not present at this meeting.

As far as I am aware, the battalion did not improve under Whelan. I think I would be safe in saying that Whelan resigned, that Kennedy was again in jail, and that a man named Larry Murphy from Streamstown became Battalion O/C. How it happened, I don't know.

The companies comprising the battalion at that time were:

Kinnegad	Mullingar	Miltownpass
Raharnay	Coole	Rochfort Bridge.
Glenidan	Lismacaffrey	
Castlepollard	Ballynacargy	

We were night and day working for the 1918 elections, canvassing, collecting funds, arranging transport and working the register. We went with the band to all the meetings and led the processions. On polling day we were voting everywhere for dead men, living men and missing people. Larry Ginnell was our candidate, and he won with a majority of a thousand votes.

In 1919 when the Dáil loan was floated, the Volunteers helped to collect for that loan. I remember I came to Dublin with £480 which had been collected in the surrounding area. Paudeen O'Keefe took the money from me. He was then secretary of the Sinn Féin organisation and had an office in Harcourt St.

The Dáil now decreed that all members of the Volunteers should take an oath of allegiance to the Dáil. We all subscribed to the oath in our area and we now became the Irish Republican Army - which was our official title - and for short we were known as the I.R.A.

The battalion was still being run on the same basis, a very loose organisation - no meetings at all and no instructions.

We lived about a mile or so in from the road. In 1919 the R.I.C. came along and searched the whole house, but they got no incriminating documents. The enemy had a peculiar system at that time. If the R.I.C. found incriminating documents on a person, they did not arrest him but sent on the papers to Dublin Castle.

Some time during the year 1919, the R.I.C. raided my home in force, surrounding the place. My brother and I were at home. They made a thorough search of the place and of ourselves. In my pocket they found a British army drill book. The Sergeant questioned me about it and said, "You will hear more about it". They did not arrest me.

Exactly four weeks later, to the day, a friend of mine living near the barracks in Collinstown called on me. Sergeant Sweeney from this barracks had knocked at a publichouse that night and said, "We will be at Maguire's at four o'clock in the morning, and tell him to get himself off". My friend got a car and came to the house to warn me. My brother and I left the house and slept in a cock of hay for the night. The R.I.C. raided the house at four o'clock in the morning. It was snowing, and there were tracks in the snow after them. This was early in 1919.

From that on, I was not staying at home at night. My brother was at home all right, as nothing incriminating had been found on him. I stayed in houses around the locality. There were plenty of houses in the neighbourhood where I was welcome to stay.

I heard that there was to be a meeting in Joe Mulready's of Mullingar with a view to attacking three or four barracks. I went into the meeting and, as usual, I did not know many of the people there, just slight acquaintances from seeing them during the elections. There were to be attacks on Streamstown and Ballynacafgy in our area, and there were a few contemplated in Athlone area also. In fact, there were to be four carried

out on the one night. That was in February, 1919. It was the first I knew or heard about it. I had nothing to do with the plans. I was on the run, and I said to myself, "That is a job that would suit me fine". Larry Murray came <sup>from</sup> ~~to~~ Athlone to attend the meeting, and I remember they were asking him how the plans were progressing. He said, "Everything is ready, to the last trouser button". Jim Tormey was also there. He was in charge of the Athlone Active Service Unit afterwards, and was killed on the other side of the Shannon a few months before the Truce. When the meeting was finished and all the arrangements were ready, I approached Larry Murray and asked him what were my chances of taking part in one of the attacks. I said, "I am on the run". He said, "You are Maguire". I said, "Yes". He said, "If you like to come, all hands are welcome". We arranged when and where to meet for the attack on Ballynacargy barracks.

Ballynacargy barracks was eighteen Irish miles from my place. I knew the road as I had travelled it once before. I brought my bicycle and two revolvers with me. When I was about a mile or a mile and a half from Ballynacargy on the main road, I put the bike into a field and walked along the grass. I could hear someone talking at the canal, about two hundred yards further on. There was no sound on the road. Then I heard a tree crashing down on the road. When I got to this spot, there was no one there, but there was a tree across the road. I retraced my footsteps and went into the village of Ballynacargy. There was a dance in progress and a melodeon playing in Mat Troy's house - an ex R.I.C. man. I heard afterwards that there was only one policeman in the barracks that night. I walked up and down the street,

in the shelter of the houses, passed by the dance and came to the tree again but could not contact anyone. There was not a sound. I did not know the village of Ballynacargy very well, but I saw no one. I returned home, arriving home at about five o'clock in the morning. I went straight to the house and told my brother, Tom, what had happened. "I never spoke to one since I left here", I said.

About a week later, Larry Murray sent in his resignation to Seumas O'Meara, then O/C of the Athlone Brigade. That was the last I heard of Murray. I think he is now living in Limerick. Streamstown was not attacked either. I heard afterwards that at Ballynacargy there were men at the canal and that they intended to move from the canal into the village. If they had knocked at the barrack door, they could have taken the barracks as the door would have been opened to them. Why they did not do so I do not know.

Things were getting hotter for me, and I found that the enemy were more anxious to arrest me. Raids were carried out by military and police in the day and in the night. I was more or less on the move and could scarcely go home in daylight. I was talking to Joe Kennedy one day about my position. There was no one appointed Battalion O/C after Larry Murray's resignation. I said to Joe, "If I don't go somewhere, I'll be arrested. I will go to Liverpool. Will you send my transfer through to whatever company is in Liverpool". He said he would make the necessary arrangements for me. I went off to Liverpool, sailing from Dublin on Grand National night, March, 1920.

<sup>HAD</sup>  
I came to Dublin some time in January, 1920.

I was not alarmed, but fed-up dodging the raids. I learned motor driving at the North Star Garage. I was living at No. 70 Eccles St. At this very same time, Paddy Mooney attacked Ballivor barracks in Meath, in which attack Constable Edgar was killed. When I went home one evening to my digs in Eccles St., I heard that the enemy had been there and turned the place upside down, looking for me. They had got the idea that I had driven a lorry to Ballivor, and that my motor driving lessons were only to make myself useful for anything that might happen, and they seriously wanted me for the murder of Constable Edgar. I have no proof of that except what I was told afterwards. I did not even know they had me under observation in Dublin.

A short time after going to Liverpool, my transfer arrived. The Company Captain, Tom Kerr, called to my digs and notified me to attend a parade next morning at half past ten or eleven o'clock, down in some basement. Afterwards, when talking to Kerr, he mentioned about getting arms and told me that all the ex soldiers were arriving back from the war and that all had their rifles with them. Any of these men that I could get in touch with, I was to try and procure arms from them - any sort of weapons. If each member of the company picked up one rifle or so, we would get a lot. I bought four or five rifles from fellows I was working with - British ex soldiers who had their rifles at home - some of them had ammunition, bayonets and all. I paid fifty shillings for each rifle, and in all I bought five or six. The orders were that if we could get thousands or hundreds, we were to buy. I couldn't get any more. The money was

supplied out of my own pocket. The money would have been supplied by Kerr, but, when he offered to pay, I refused to take the money because I thought that I would get them sent to my own place at home. I learned later that it would not be possible to do so. Drilling and purchasing went on until September, when I decided to return home, as Tom, my brother, was writing every other week asking me to come back as there was no one doing anything locally.

Before leaving Liverpool, I decided to procure some shotgun cartridges, to take with me to my own place. I went to an old shop in Derby road and told the men there that I wanted some cartridges as I was going down to Attcar to shoot pheasants. He gave me two hundred cartridges and I took them to my digs, which was owned by an Irishwoman. I knew I could not bring them to Ireland in a suitcase. I took off my coat and waistcoat. I put a false back in the waistcoat, quilted it with a needle and thread, and fitted in the cartridges into it. I had quite a hump when I got off the boat at the North Wall, Dublin, and walked up Amiens St. I brought the cartridges home and hid them away safely.

When I got home to Glenidan, I found that the Volunteers had collected a small amount of guns. We decided on further raids over a larger area, and collected more shotguns. There were no rifles in the locality. We made a few dumps for the arms, and I arranged for a few Volunteers to make buckshot and re-load the two hundred cartridges, which I had brought from Liverpool, with buckshot. The R.I.C. had moved from Collinstown to Castlepollard, leaving <sup>Collinstown</sup>~~Castlepollard~~ vacant.

During my absence, the Mullingar and Athlone Brigades had been formed, probably during the summer. I felt like a fish out of water. Davy Burke was O/C Mullingar Brigade. He had a publichouse beside the post office. The battalions had been reorganised. The 1st Battalion was Mullingar. The 2nd Battalion was Loughnavalley area, with Willie Fox as O/C. The 3rd Battalion was Kinnegad area, with James Reilly as O/C. (Joe Beglin preceded him). The 4th Battalion was Castlepollard area, with - McCabe as O/C.

My area was the 4th Battalion. I was now Company Captain of the twelve or fourteen Volunteers who were members. I don't know if there was even a parade while I was away. No serious thought was given to training and organising.

I remember going into Castlepollard on the first Sunday evening after my return, and meeting Tom Maguire, a native of Castlepollard, and Jack Macken from Whitehall village. They told me that McCabe had gone to Mullingar to attend a Brigade meeting, and that I should wait until he came back. I waited with the boys. I did not think there would be any danger of the enemy coming, and there was not. When McCabe returned from Mullingar, he informed us that he had some instructions. Terence MacSwiney was about to die, and an order was issued that the worst R.I.C. men in each district was to be shot. The order came from the I.R.B. and also from Volunteer Headquarters. I suggested that we should shoot an R.I.C. man in Castlepollard, named Lynch. He was living in a private house. I had no battalion rank, but these officers discussed the matter with me. Evidently they thought I might have gained some experience while in Liverpool.

McCabe and I walked through the town and around the roads. He said, "There is one thing on my mind. The peelers have pulled in about fifteen of our Volunteers on trifling charges - having no lights on their bicycles and things like that. The courts will be sitting next month. Would you take part with us in the capture of the Magistrate of the British Courts?" I agreed, and we made the arrangements. We were to capture him on the road coming to Castlepollard. I contacted Jack Macken, who was Battalion O/C I think, and he said he would get the two brothers - Jimmy and Matt Bruton. I said I would bring two or three men from my company. We did not bother going over the ground as we knew the set-up of the road. There was a very steep hill where the river came near the road at Crookedwood, and we selected this point for the operation.

When we met on the day appointed, McCabe had a Volunteer ready to drive the Magistrate's car. We went to the meeting place on bicycles, which we dumped on getting there. It was a valley. Jimmy Bruton was on one hill in view of his brother, who was on the other hill. Macken, Flynn and Tom McDonnell stayed on the road. We had made arrangements that if the car was accompanied by an escort, a white flag would be waved and we would conceal ourselves and let them pass by unmolested. We put a ladder, which had been up against a house, across the road, with a couple of big stones on each side of it. We waited and after some time we could see the car coming without an escort.

When the car reached our position on the road, it came to a halt as it reached the ladder across the road. Actually the car contained two Magistrates - Mr. Moore, R.M., and Mr. Hyde, J.P. They wanted to

know what it was all about, and I told them to get out of the car. Macken, with a .32 revolver, was there, ready to fire. I had a long .45 Webley that I had brought back from Dublin. The rest of our party were unarmed. We thought the occupants of the car would be armed, but we observed no move for arms. We put a few stones at the back wheels to stop the car going downhill. We ordered them into the back of the car and blindfolded them, but we did not tie them up. While this was happening, our driver had been sent off down the road, where he waited until we would call him. He was known to the occupants, who might identify him later. I went with them in the car and we drove on through the village of Fore, about twelve or fourteen miles, by by-roads to Mullagheen. We parked the car at the end of a boreen over Lough Sheelin, and we handed over the two Magistrates to the local Volunteers there, one of whom was Jack McGinn.

The two Magistrates were kept in a farmhouse at Mullaghaheen for eight or ten days. They were then taken out, brought blindfolded to County Cavan and released. I could not say who gave the order to release them. After being released, they called at the first police barracks that was on the road. Although blindfolded, they had a sense of direction and knew they had been taken northwards.

The enemy threatened they would burn Mullingar if the Magistrates were not handed back intact. No one came to me actually, but I heard that a member of the Brigade Staff had come looking for me and asking that I should release them. The next thing I heard was that they were released.

Immediately following this, the military <sup>AND</sup> police - a large force - I saw twenty lorry loads - went out and they arrested every man, woman and child in the Castlepollard area. They left the Volunteer organisation a complete wreck in the area. Macken was arrested, but was not identified. I warned him not to stay at home, but he did, and was arrested again. Half a dozen Volunteers got penal servitude, charged with being members of an illegal organisation, etc. They left no one in that area except a couple of lads 'on the run' with me. Every house was raided. They took it in sections and made a very good job of it. Every good man was gone, including the Battalion O/C. We were now faced with the job of reorganising. It often struck me that someone was giving information to the enemy in our area.

While the two magistrates were still prisoners, two officers came from G.H.Q., Dublin, to attend a meeting at Chapel House in Mullingar - Bob Price and Fionán Lynch. Whether they knew about the kidnapping, I don't know. I had made no report about it to anyone. McCabe being my senior officer, I did not bother. It was not done in a military fashion. McCabe was at this meeting, and after the meeting I saw him talking to these two officers. He had a written report of the capture of the J.P. and the R.M. He called me over to join them and said, "This is the man responsible. That's the man who captured them". They then sprang a surprise. Davy Burke had resigned the post of Brigade O/C, and their job was to appoint someone in his place. One of them said to McCabe, "Now, you take charge of the brigade"! McCabe said, "I could not do that. I wouldn't be capable of doing it". The officer said, "You have your orders". McCabe said to me, "Will you help me?". I said, "I'll do anything I can". McCabe then said he would

accept it. I was made Vice O/C of the Brigade on the spot.

My new post as Brigade Vice O/C would have meant my travelling all over the Brigade area, if the enemy round-up had not put a stop to our activities. Every officer I could trust was arrested. Even McCabe himself was soon gone, and one of the men arrested, Michael Flynn, died in Mountjoy. His brother was a good I.R.A. man. I decided to seek the advice of G.H.Q. about reorganising the area, and I went to Dublin by car. This would be the end of October, 1920.

I was outside Mountjoy Jail when some Volunteer prisoners were brought along in a lorry by military. The Volunteers were in uniform. They were to stand guard over the remains of Terence MacSwiney. When Flynn's remains left Dublin to be buried at home, I did not go with it but remained in Dublin.

I put in an awful week trying to locate a G.H.Q. officer, to explain the position of the Brigade to him and seek advice. I was seven days going around Dublin, being sent from one place to another. I heard afterwards that they suspected me and a few lads were following me. I was looking for either Lynch or Price, but could not get in touch with them. I was introduced to Gearóid O'Sullivan, Dick Mulcahy and others. Eventually, I was sent to Tom Cullen, the architect, in Suffolk St. That was the first time I knew I was in touch with someone. I started to tell him about my difficulties, but he interrupted and said, "I know the whole position. You want to get the organisation going"? I said I would like to do so. He said, "Go back to Mullingar. Get someone there to notify the captain of each company and whatever battalion officers are left in the brigade. Call a meeting for two or three o'clock in the day on the 1st November, in the

Old Chapel House, Mullingar<sup>u</sup>.

I went back to Mullingar and contacted all the officers I knew. I succeeded in getting twelve or fourteen to attend the meeting. On the day of the meeting, Tom Cullen and Bob Price walked into the hall, sat at a table and took out some papers. A roll-call was made of the different Company and Battalion officers. One of the G.H.Q. officers then announced, "Mr. Maguire here is in charge of the Brigade from now on". I protested that I would not be able to do it, but they insisted.

I had no one locally on whom I could depend to assist me in organising the Brigade, beyond the two Beglans, Joe and Charlie, from Milltownpass. They were also 'on the run', and that is how I got to know them so well. I asked them would they stay on in my part of the country and help me, and they agreed.

Re-organising the Brigade was a big proposition. I felt I had not the ability, and could only do my best. There were four battalions. I got into plenty of trouble. I found there was a lot of resentment in Mullingar over the idea of a country greenhorn like myself coming to command them. The trouble arose over the order for the shooting of the worst R.I.C. man. We had no Black and Tans at the time. There was none in Castlepollard; there might be one or two in Mullingar.

There had been a skeleton brigade staff under Burke previously, but nothing much. There were no parades, no Brigade Vice Commandant, no Brigade Adjutant and no Brigade Q.M. A man named Seamus Murphy, a railway clerk in Mullingar, came to me one night and asked me to take him along. He said that there had been some men arrested

and that he would like to leave as he did not relish being arrested also. I agreed. He was very good with the pen and did the adjutant's work. He was acting as adjutant and also as a kind of Quartermaster. I was trying to get things into shape and to find who was who.

I remember the first meeting we had of the 3rd Battalion I think it was held in the schoolhouse in Raharney at the end of November or beginning of December. I said I wanted their co-operation. Two officers came up and said they would not have anything more to do with it, and they quit. I organised the battalion, laid down instructions for training and arranged for a parade every week. Jimmy Reilly was O/C of the 3rd Battalion at that time, but he was arrested later, and Jimmy <sup>Non</sup>Lenihan was O/C at the Truce.

Reilly attacked two R.I.C. men going to the bog to cut turf. He thought they would be armed. He had informed me previously of his intention and I wanted to go along with him, but he said it was not necessary, that he would bring one of his own men. He brought Christy Reilly with him. The next thing I heard was that Jimmy Reilly had been arrested. It was very shortly after the battalion meeting. I don't think they were armed, and he acted foolishly. He had some sort of a revolver and some cartridges, but whether it would fire or not, I cannot say. When Jimmy hit one of the R.I.C. men and had him down, the other R.I.C. man hit him with a bottle of buttermilk, and temporarily knocked him out. The other Volunteer ran away. Jimmy Reilly was an active man and would have been useful, but unfortunately he was caught. Lenihan took over the battalion then.

The 1st Battalion, which comprised Mullingar, was in a bad state of disorganisation. McCoy was O/C of the 1st Battalion. Later on, he was arrested, and whether Killeavy or Grogan was appointed then I can't remember. Grogan was O/C on the day of the Truce. Killeavy said he was appointed Brigade Vice O/C before the Truce, and I held that he was not. We fell out very badly over that. I tried to reason it out with him. I said, "Can you tell me did you come to any Battalion Council, or call any meeting?". He said, "No, but I was Vice O/C". I said, "Where were you appointed?". "In the old castle yard in Knockdrin". Either Seán Grogan or Killeavy was O/C of the battalion. In the town of Mullingar, there was no co-operation. As far as I can recollect, when Burke resigned as Brigade O/C, someone asked him to take in despatches, and he agreed to do so. Having a publichouse, it was very convenient. Railway men came along and left despatches there. I could get no communications through Burke and, when I went to see him, I found he was not handling despatches. I had to give the despatches to Nicholas McCabe himself.

The 2nd Battalion was Loughnavalley. The O/C was William Cox.

The 4th Battalion, Castlepollard, was my own area. <sup>Patrick</sup>~~Thomas~~ Kiernan was O/C at the Truce. John Macken was Vice O/C after McCabe's arrest. James Devitt, the Battalion Adjutant, was also arrested. At one time, all the officers were gone. By now our Brigade had been incorporated into the 1st Eastern Division which had been organised. Seán Boylan of Dunboyne was the Divisional O/C.

Beglan was called to Divisional Headquarters to settle some land dispute in which he was involved. Eamon Cullen came to me and told me to dispense with Beglan's services as Adjutant, which was his nominal appointment, and reduce him to the rank of ordinary Volunteer. This was as a result of his being mixed up in a land dispute. Murphy was acting Adjutant and Quartermaster, and subsequently Joe Doyle was appointed Quartermaster.

I issued an order for a general collection to be made all over the area to buy arms, and I think I got £600. We needed arms badly. I had got a good rifle and a revolver myself. There were five or six rifles in Mullingar Company area. They had been taken from individual soldiers or bought off them from time to time, and were stored away. No one would tell where they were. I subsequently learned that they were in McDonnell's bakery. There were a few antiquated revolvers and about two or three serviceable ones. We had plenty of good double-barrelled shotguns. An Offaly man in Mullingar was responsible for getting some of the rifles. He was a real rolling-stone, served a while in Wexford and finished up in Limerick. He jumped some soldiers and took rifles off them, helped by Kit Whelan. There were about sixty men in the battalion, comprising four or five companies, with fifteen or sixteen in each company.

We were busy getting ready for action. The enemy seemed to know about everything we attempted even before we had seriously considered it ourselves. There were three or four lads with me in the Castlepollard area - Tom McDonnell, Kit Flynn, and the two Begleys. I had a revolver and each of the Begleys had one. When I would

be near my home, we would have a rifle too. There were no regular enemy patrols in that area. We decided to lie in wait for a patrol on the road between Castlepollard and *COHINSTOWN*, but they never came near us. During a few weeks, we lay in wait for a couple of days, and no enemy turned up. The following day, they would pass. I don't think anyone was giving away information, but it was just chance.

In the 1st Battalion, the O/C was not 'on the run' (Grogan or Killeavy). No man in the battalion was 'on the run' except Murphy, the railway clerk, who came to me. In the 2nd Battalion, no one was 'on the run'. Willie Fox carried on his business and attended meetings, but nothing else. In the 3rd Battalion, Lenihan, when he was appointed, was not active. Kiernan from outside Castlepollard was Battalion O/C and he was not 'on the run'. There was no chance of establishing an Active Service Unit, except for the few men "on the run" with me.

We were waiting to get a chance of engaging the enemy. In some of their rounds-up, the military in force occupied the town hall, bringing full equipment with them, field kitchens, etc., and from there, they made several swoops around the country, arresting many Volunteers, including my brother Tom, who was a district councillor.

I mobilised the whole Castlepollard Battalion one night, for a try-out. About fifty-six turned up, armed with shotguns or anything they could get. I considered it a good number. It was a matter of the Company Captains picking out a number of men, and there were no refusals. We took over Castlepollard town and manned both sides of the streets. The barracks was on the Dublin road, about

eighty yards from the Square, and was in full view of the courthouse. We decided to burn the courthouse. We procured some wood and set fire to the courthouse. I posted four men in a house opposite the barracks, and instructed them that, no matter what happened, they were not to fire until we had got the enemy out, and that when we opened fire on them, they were to give them hell on their way back. We stayed there until four o'clock in the morning. We sang songs and everything. Not a man came out of the barracks. We did not fire one shot, and neither did they. No reinforcements were called, as we had all the roads leading to it blocked and covered, especially the Mullingar roads. We all dispersed then.

The next thing of any importance was in May, 1921, when instructions were issued by General Headquarters regarding the State witnesses who were to travel to Dublin for Seán MacEoin's trial. Harry Conroy, unfortunately now deceased, would know more about this than I do. Some time prior to MacEoin's arrest - about March, 1921 - Ginger O'Connell introduced Harry Conroy to me, and said, "This is to be your Chief Intelligence Officer". He was posing as an insurance superintendent and was carrying all the necessary insurance papers. Conroy went to Dublin and came back with a verbal message from the Big Fellow (Collins) that the witnesses going to Dublin for MacEoin's trial were not to be left alive or pass through our area. I suppose that was a very tall order.

I contacted a man in a company of the 1st Battalion, named Seán Dowling, an ex member of the Irish Guards, and we travelled the length of the Brigade area to find a suitable place. We went by road from a point near Ballinalack, through Mullingar, to ~~Ballinagad~~<sup>KINNEGAD</sup>. We

ruled out Ballina<sup>LACK</sup>~~na~~ because we had no Volunteers there. We decided upon Griffinstown, between Kinnegad and Mullingar and nearer to Kinnegad. It was dead flat country and the only thing in our favour was a bit of a fort and the ruins of an old house on each side of the road.

I should mention that, by this time, we had been formed into Divisions and that we were now the 5th Brigade in the 1st Eastern Division. Eamon Cullen, who was Divisional Engineer, had come from Dublin to give classes in engineering - how to make land mines, road blocks, and all sorts of things. These classes were held in a place called Clonlost. Jimmy Nea was appointed Brigade Engineer. He was living in New York for some time but he is home now.

My work entailed much travelling through the battalion areas, 2nd, 3rd and 4th. We did not draw much out of the 1st Battalion because they might be missed from the town and it would be difficult for them to go back to the town, but I insisted on the five or six rifles coming out of Mullingar - some long rifles and some short rifles - as well as miscellaneous ammunition and carbines. I had organised the 3rd Battalion fairly well. I had trained my own company at home in signalling - flags and semaphore. I had no regular company of signallers, of course. I travelled all the time. I think I was three days and three nights without any sleep, mobilising, giving instructions, collecting shotguns, rifles, explosives, such as cheddar or warflour.

We made a strong mine - concrete block - and we planted it in the centre of the road. We were expecting sixteen lorries to come along, containing Tans and

Auxiliaries, as well as civilians. We were informed that half of the number of men in the lorries would be civilians. I had forty-two men, under arms of all sorts, at four o'clock in the morning on the roadside, and spent a couple of hours' hard work putting them in different positions. They were extended towards Kinnegad, staggered behind fences on both sides of the road. We stayed there until about 11.45 a.m. The Engineer was adjusting the exploder for the mine, with a penknife, when it suddenly went off. The next thing I saw was a tree going up in the air. No harm was done except that a hole was blown in the road. No enemy appeared.

We heard afterwards that not a soldier, R.I.C. man or Tan put his nose on the street in Mullingar that day, nor the night after. It shows that they knew about us. If they had come out to our position, they could have wiped us out. The County Inspector of the R.I.C., I learned on good authority, had made an order that, under no circumstances, were they to be the first to shoot. He said, "There is enough trouble everywhere else, but not here! Arrest men, but don't shoot anyone". That was their policy.

To return to the witnesses for Seán MacEoin's trial, they were in Dublin long before we took up our position. District Inspector Harrington of Longford was in charge of them. The whole group went by rail via Longford. A telegraph message had come, telling them they were to go by road. The information was passed on to us and the message de-coded, but D.I. Harrington had taken them in batches - by different trains - to Dublin. Harrington himself travelled in civilian attire.

After MacEoin was sentenced, D.I. Harrington got a bicycle and cycled the whole way back to Longford, stopping at publichouses en route and holding conversations with the occupants. He was attired as an ordinary working-man or artisan. When he came to Kinnegad, he went into a publichouse, had a drink and spoke to the locals. In the course of conversation, one of the locals said, "There was going to be slaughter, the other morning. They had artillery and mines, but nothing happened". Harrington did not go into the local barracks, but went to the place referred to, took measurements of the whole place and examined it all. He went home to Longford and reported it. He said, "The group of men there were going to fight to the finish. There would not have been a hope for any of them. If any man left his position, he would have been shot like a lamb. We never anticipated that they would have been in that position". There were no hills and no escape in the flat country.

Afterwards, D.I. Harrington joined the Civic Guards. Eamonn Cullen was Assistant Commissioner of the Guards. They were talking in the Depot about their experiences. Harrington explained to Cullen how he got the witnesses to Dublin and also repeated his verdict regarding the ambush position at Griffinstown.

Half of our men had cartridges which would not extract. There were forty-two in all. I lined them up and warned them that they might not come out of it alive. Jack Brogan, Battalion Quartermaster in Castlepollard, who was 'on the run', was looking after the arms. After lining up the men on the side of the road, I walked along, telling them what was happening and that we would have to

stick it out. Jack Brogan came over and said, "Jim, I think they will knock hell out of us!" We lay for eight hours in the ambush position, but they did not come.

We cycled all over the country back to our destinations. All the men carried their arms on their shoulders, riding along. There were forty-two under arms. There were twenty out on signals. All the bye-roads were blocked. It would take them some time to contact us. The area was a network of roads. We were only eight miles from Mullingar and one mile from Kinnefad. That was our second biggest attempt to get anything done, and it failed. This was in May, 1921. Our previous one was the attempt to capture the R.I.C. barracks in 1920.

I remember one other incident. There were two men in the parishes of Fore and Collinstown. One was <sup>NNDN</sup> ~~Harran~~ and the other was Clarke. I don't know where <sup>NNON</sup> ~~Harran~~ came from, but Clarke was from Mullagh in Co. Cavan. Jack McGuinness of Offaly would know more about this. I am only giving it secondhand. These two men had retired from the R.I.C. but had rejoined, and they were worse than the Tans.

When Clarke rejoined the R.I.C., he was serving in Clara, Offaly. One day, Mick Gilsenan informed me that Clarke was at home in his labourer's cottage in Fore, where his wife and children were living. I decided to investigate and went into the village. When I got to the wooden gate outside his house, I went over to one of the windows and looked in. There was Clarke in the bed and his wife giving him a drink. We had heard that he would be going to the fair to buy a pony for his wife and children.

Charlie Begley, Tom McDonnell, Kit Flynn and myself went about three miles distance on the road between Fore and Oldcastle, where we waited, armed with revolvers, for Clarke to come along. We saw no sign of him. We waited until we thought he might be coming home along the road. We thought he might have stayed in Ballyduff where he had friends. We waited there until ten o'clock at night, and he did not come. We sent a message to Fore, where Gilsenan was watching, and he informed us that Clarke had not arrived at his home. We waited for him for a third day, and he did not come - no Clarke, no pony, so we decided to call it off.

On the following night, Gilsenan came to me and said, "He's back!" Instead of going back home, Clarke had gone to friends in Mullagh - he had not bought a pony. He travelled in civilian attire on a bicycle. We decided to make another attempt to get him.

We arranged that Gilsenan, who owned a piece of land alongside Clarke's house, would start to build a wall, and that he would spend his day there, watching Clarke's house. I posted three Volunteers on the Drumcree-Clara road, although we were confident that he would not go in that direction, but surely to Castlepollard. We decided to take up positions each side of where Clarke resided. Kit Flynn, Jack Carroll and Charlie Beglan were on the Mullagh side, and Joe Fitzsimons. I was on the Castlepollard side. Joe Fitzsimons was from my own section at home, and he had a good revolver which he got from his brother, an officer in the British army. If Clarke came out of the house, Gilsenan was to go in the opposite direction to inform the waiting Volunteers when

he (Clarke) had left the house and what direction he had taken.

We were in our position at eight o'clock in the morning. At about 10.30 or 11 a.m., Gilsenan came up the road to my position and said, "He is gone the other way". I said, "All right". We left our position, taking a circuit behind the village, and met the other Volunteers where we expected them to have their prisoner. We were walking. There was only a distance of about two miles between us. He was on a bicycle. We would prefer to take Clarke prisoner and execute him afterwards, as we knew that if his remains were found, houses would be burned all over the area as a reprisal for the death of a man. Fr. Keapok was to attend to him before he would be executed. Clarke was a Catholic alright. When we had completed half our journey, we met the three Volunteers - and no prisoner. They saw him coming around the curve, and slipped down from a high ditch in which they were concealed on to the roadside. When he saw them, he jumped off his bicycle, whipped his <sup>REVOLVER</sup> ~~nife~~ from his <sup>HOLSTER</sup> ~~shoulder~~ and fired at them. They returned fire but he got back to his wife and family. Then, taking one of his sons with him on another bicycle, off with him to Castlepollard - on the road that we were after vacating. He apparently was not to be shot!"

There we were, sitting on the side of the hill, and our game gone. We did not know, of course, that he had gone off again. He went into Castlepollard to the police barracks and reported the whole affair. He showed them his own <sup>REVOLVER</sup> ~~nife~~, from which he had fired six rounds, but they did not believe him. The police came out when

they got military and police reinforcements. Clarke showed them everything, but they made no move to arrest anyone. I still think they doubted his word. He had a bad name, and they were not taking any chances. He is dead since. He died in Mullagh, having served with the R.I.C. until he was disbanded. His wife and family cleared out of our area.

We were waiting in ambush several times at ~~Knockabney~~ <sup>LICKBREA</sup>, but no enemy forces put in an appearance. We brought off a mock raid on the post office in Castletown in an effort to entice them out, but they did not come.

Just before the Truce, I got an instruction from Divisional Commander Seán Boylan that every barracks in the area was to be attacked on the day of the Truce. I sent the two Begleys to attack Mullingar barracks. I, with about six or eight others, opened up fire on Castlepollard, using up a lot of ammunition. We had four or five rifles from Mullingar Battalion area. We gave them a royal salute until the bell rang the Angelus, and we went off.

Trenching roads were the order of the day in April and May, 1921. We cut the road between Castlepollard and the village of Fore at Mooretown, and the R.I.C. came along a few days later and filled it up. They got no help from the local people because we had warned them not to assist the enemy in filling in the trenches. I came along in the month of May and cut the road again, beside the other one. There was a good big dyke there and we emptied the material into it. Wherever I had been just previous to that, I was pretty tired, so I went into a house in a laneway for a sleep. I could see the Volunteer guards on

the road, watching. It was very foggy, just coming on daylight. I was just asleep when I heard guns firing, and I got up immediately. Two or three Volunteers came in and said they were after being fired on at the cutting. The scout, Joe Begley, came in also. He had a revolver, but none of the others had any arms. When he heard the noise of a vehicle coming along the road, he was not sure at first if it was an enemy lorry or not, and decided to wait until it came nearer. When he saw it was the enemy, he fired a couple of shots at the lorry. They returned the fire and swept down and around to the crossroads. They did not go into the cutting. They knew it was there. Bill Smith's coat had been picked up by the enemy and in the pocket was a letter from a girl. He was the parish priest's servant boy. Smith was arrested afterwards and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

We carried out some raids on the mails. We wanted to show the enemy that we were not beaten. We would wait for the postman to come along the road with the mailbag, hold him up, take the letters to a wood, censor the letters and mark them. We never got any useful information in these raids, but we wanted the enemy to know that we were not upset. More often than not, the postman would be a Volunteer. We would have no trouble in holding up the postman.

No spies were shot in our area.

There was a Justice of the Peace in our area. He was a neighbour of mine, a man named Christy Black, who was also an auctioneer. He had been offered the job as J.P. when the British authorities could not get anyone

else to take it. On one occasion, he went to Castlepollard to attend a petty sessions, but the court could not be held as there was only himself present. He got into a lorry with Tans and R.I.C., and went to the residence of the Court President, Mr. Tilson, on the Coole road. Tilson refused point-blank to have anything to do with the court. He refused to attend, and the court had to be abandoned. Black came back into town and got drunk with the Tans and R.I.C. There might have been one or two Tans, and I think there were about twenty-eight R.I.C. men in the barracks in Castlepollard. Whatever transpired, the upshot of it was that Black volunteered to get me for the Tans, as he knew my movements. As far as I can recollect, an R.I.C. man gave this information to me. Joe Begley, Jim Murphy and myself went up next night to Black's house, which was about half a mile from mine. We knocked at the door and his mother opened it. I said, "Is Christy in?" She said, "He is". I said, "Tell him to come down. I want to see him". Evidently he had cooled off, and would not come down. The area in which he lived was the Delvin Brigade, which was under Mick Hiney. Mick Fox was Company Captain in Delvin. Hiney and Black were great friends. Black would not come even to the window but stayed inside in the room, and said to me, "Maguire, you can go home". We argued for an hour. I wanted him to come out and talk it over, but he wouldn't.

Murphy made out a report on this matter, and sent it to Headquarters. Evidently, in Headquarters they looked up a map to see whose area it was, and sent an order to Hiney to have Black executed. Hiney would as well have killed his own brother, so he did nothing about it. They were very close.

Whoever was giving information was doing it on the quiet. We captured a letter in a raid on the mails. It was written by a man named Fitzpatrick to enemy Headquarters in the Castle. When we went to look for him, he was gone to Cork. He was not a Volunteer, and was doing it for money. He was after running away with a girl. There was no one else in our area giving information directly to the enemy.

No ammunition or buckshot was made in the area. Some road mines were constructed. A few bombs of the cart box wheels type were made, but they were never used. We made a couple of stone of black powder from charcoal and sulphur, but we could not use it. It got damp and was not effective.

Regarding Intelligence, the man who started using Susie Poole (Mrs. Goddard) for intelligence purposes was Mick Murray of 451, Collins Avenue, now an agent in the New Ireland Assurance Company.

I think I would be safe in saying that nothing useful in the way of intelligence came from Mullingar post office. The material got from there had no bearing on the Mullingar Brigade area, although communications captured concerned other areas. The staff in the Mullingar Post Office were Jimmy Hynes, Mick Dunne and Miss Lily Dawson, who were the three principal officials. Mr. Harry Conroy would know more about it, because he was dealing with them. He had been sent by Mick Collins to Mullingar to work up this source of information and to arrange lines of communication for getting it to General Headquarters or to other places concerned. Hynes, who was principal telegraphist, arranged that, when one of them

was going off duty, he would take it to a selected agent. All communications were dealt with directly by Nicholas McCabe who had organised the railway communications from Athlone to Dublin.

Jimmy Hynes intercepted the message from Dublin Castle to the police in Mullingar that Seán MacEoin was travelling on the train, leaving Dublin by evening train for Longford, and that he was to be arrested at Mullingar station. Hynes passed this message out to Killeavy, I think it was. That night, I was sitting in a back parlour in a licensed premises in Mullingar, drinking port with Harry Conroy when a messenger came along to Conroy. I don't think Hynes had carried out the message himself, but he sent someone else with it. When he came off duty, the shooting had taken place and MacEoin was arrested. Hynes went to Killeavy and said, "Did you get my message?". Killeavy said, "Yes, but I could not get a bicycle". It was only when the messenger came to Conroy that I learned that MacEoin had been arrested and was now also badly wounded.

There was a lady living in Ballynacargy by the name of Mrs. Susie Goddard. Her father and mother owned the post office there. She was married to a Captain Goddard who was serving in the British army while she was a chorus girl on the stage in London. She was a very attractive woman in every way. Harry Conroy and Mick Murray of Ballynacargy had already contacted Mrs. Goddard before I met her. When her husband was demobbed after the war in 1918, he joined the Auxiliaries, came to Ireland and was stationed in Sligo or the west. Mrs. Goddard was living still in Ballynacargy. She wanted to get her

husband shot, and wanted the I.R.A. to do it, and was willing to do anything she could do in return for this favour. At the same time, she was doing a very strong line with Adjutant Wallace of the Mullingar barracks. He used go to see her from time to time in Ballynacargy. We knew about this, and thought it might prove useful. It did prove useful and she was able to pick up an amount of useful information regarding pending raids and rounds up by the enemy.

Conroy told Mick Collins about Mrs. Goddard and what she could do and how she could fit into any position. Arrangements were made, which Murray would know more about, because he went into Mullingar to Brophy's Hotel to meet Erskine Childers. He was either to meet Susie, or bring her there to meet Childers. However, the whole thing was called off because peace overtures were going on, that we knew nothing about, and Childers did not meet her.

Collins got Mrs. Goddard to come up to Dublin and interviewed her himself and laid his plans. That was the last we saw of Susie for some time. She had a flat in Dublin and entertained the Auxiliary and other officers of the Castle. Collins met the officers at her flat, being introduced as some lover of Susie's. Susie was "here to-day and gone to-morrow". She would say to me, "Michael Collins is a lovely boy. I love Michael Collins". She would love anyone!

When the Truce came, Susie returned to Ballynacargy, and with her came the husband. It was then I met him for the first time.

Mrs. Goddard was useful to us before the Truce. She gave us information she got from Captain Wallace, Adjutant of Mullingar Barracks. If a big round-up was intended, she would pass that information on to us. She was a good-natured, unfortunate girl. I never knew what to make of her. Anything that was impossible was her ambition, and it nearly broke her heart if she did not get it. She thought nothing of passing on what information she could get. When her husband was demobbed from the Auxiliaries, he went to Palestine to join the police there. It was not for love of money that she did this for us.

Regarding the I.R.B., I was first initiated into it some time in 1918 by Joe Kennedy, the local centre in Castlepollard. The County Centre was Davy Daly from Faheran, near Moate. We had local circles in nearly every company area by April or May previous to the Truce. The I.R.B. served a purpose early on, and it would serve a purpose to-day in trying to take away the border. It continued up to the truce and even after it.

Signed: James Travers  
Date: 18/6/66

Witness: Mattie Davy  
(Investigator)

