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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

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DUPPLICATE

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. .... 1454 .....

Witness

James Leahy,  
8, McDonagh Street,  
Nenagh,  
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Commandant, No. 2 (Mid) Tipperary Brigade.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Irish Republican Brotherhood  
and Sinn Féin activities, Thurles, Co. Tipperary,  
1914 - July, 1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

5.

File No ..... S-790.....

Form B.S.M. 2

DUPPLICATE

STATEMENT BY JAMES LEAHY,

8 McDonagh Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

(formerly Commandant, No. 2 (Mid) Tipp-  
Brigade)

I was born in 1896 in the townland of Tubberadore, the heart of a district in Tipperary which was famous for its hurlers. My parents were of farming stock and in my family there were five boys and three girls. We all went to the local national school at Gaile, which I left at the age of 15. years and for a year afterwards I worked at home on my parents' holding. When I had attained 16 years I was apprenticed to the grocery and spirit business in Hughie Shelley's of Thurles. Later on I went to work for Michael Bowe in the same business in that town. I was with the last mentioned employer until the end of 1916 when I had to go home for a period to recuperate from sickness.

I returned to business in Thurles early in 1917, and then went to work for Michael (or 'Mixey') O'Connell, as he was popularly called. O'Connell was a prominent Sinn Feiner and Irish Volunteer and his house in later days became the headquarters of the Mid-Tipperary Brigade. I lived indoor while in his employment.

I joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in the town of Thurles at the beginning of 1914, but left the movement when the vast majority of the Thurles Volunteers decided to support the Redmondite group when the 'split' occurred in August 1914. In fact, no Irish Volunteer unit existed in Thurles for six months or so after this 'split', but when a company was re-established there in 1915 I rejoined.

To the best of my recollection, the only other Irish

Volunteer units in the neighbourhood of Thurles at the commencement of 1916 were at Glengoole and Inch, The Ragg. At Glengoole, the man in charge was Johnny Norton, afterwards vice-commandant of the 1st Battalion, Mid-Tipperary Brigade. The leader in Inch was a mere schoolboy, Eddie Meagher, Annfield, who later was ordained a priest and died only recently in California. In November 1915, Eddie Meagher brought a couple of miniature rifles and a number of shotguns from Dublin to Thurles which were later shifted out to his own home in Annfield. He got these guns in Liberty Hall. The Inch (The Ragg) company used these rifles for target practice on Sundays during the opening months of 1916, but I did not participate in this training.

The Irish Volunteers in Glengoole also got shotguns around the same time - I can't say how many - from Liberty Hall. The company captain in Glengoole, Johnny Norton, was a personal friend of the Citizen Army Chief, James Connolly, having become acquainted with him through their connection with the Irish Transport Workers' Union.

In January or February 1916, I was sworn into the I.R.B. by Jimmie Kennedy, the Town Clerk in Thurles, and the local I.R.B. Centre. It was he who was responsible for the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers in the town in 1915.

I was still in Thurles when the Rising occurred in Dublin in Easter 1916. Jimmie Kennedy was in direct contact with the leaders of the Rising. A dispatch was received by him on Easter Sunday, or on the previous day, from Dublin. I am not aware of the contents of this dispatch, but I do know that in pursuance of whatever instructions he received he set out on a bicycle journey during the course of which he fell off his machine and was laid up for about a fortnight afterwards.

The accident did not prevent him from calling a meeting of the Thurles I.R.B. Circle at his bedside at which he told us about the Rising in Dublin and also made arrangements for the transfer of five or six rifles from Thurles to Annefield and, as far as I can remember, a couple of automatic pistols. At any rate, I think this meeting took place on Easter Monday and on the following Wednesday the guns were removed by myself, Michael Eustace and Mick Burke, assisted by Josephine and Kathleen Maher, Annefield; the former lady is now my wife.

On reaching Annefield we found Eamon O'Dwyer, Ballagh, and some of the Inch Volunteers - I can't give the number - assembled in Meagher's house and we handed over the arms to them. O'Dwyer and his party remained in Annefield for the rest of Easter Week while a number of other Volunteers, like myself, came to and went from the place in the hope that orders would come from Dublin indicating that action we should take. Joe McDonagh, then stationed in Thurles as an Excise Officer, met me several times during the week and we discussed the fighting in Dublin. Some days after the collapse of the Rising he called to Bowe's shop to tell me that his brother, Tom, was gone. He was alluding to Thomas McDonagh who had been executed by the British for his part in the Rising.

On Thursday of Easter Week the R.I.C. in large numbers raided Meagher's of Annefield. Eamon Dwyer managed to escape out of the house by the back door, and the only man whom the police found around the place was young Eamon Meagher. On account of his youth the raiders did not look upon him as being of much importance and they had to leave, without effecting an arrest, or finding any of the guns which were concealed in the neighbourhood. Dwyer departed from Annefield that day to contact Pierce McCann in South Tipperary who was supposed

to have received some orders from G.H.Q.. I think Dwyer was arrested by the R.I.C. on his journey, and McCann was also taken into custody on that or on the following day. In any case, they were the only two men in the area who were arrested at that particular time.

After the suppression of the Easter Rising in 1916, the Irish Volunteer movement around Thurles went out of existence. Undoubtedly, the rebellion and the execution of the leaders had a most pronounced effect on public feeling in the locality. There was a great deal of discussion among people in all walks of life over the whole affair. In most quarters, the executions were strongly condemned; the men who had lost or risked their lives in the fight were now being regarded as heroes.

In the summer of 1916, the I.R.B. Centre, Jimmy Kennedy, summoned the circle and announced his intention to revive the Volunteer movement. At the outset this move had to be carried out quietly, as the authorities were very much on the alert for any attempt to create 'disaffection' among the people; but nearly all the men who were in the ranks prior to the Rising answered the call and rejoined the revived unit.

We met and drilled in the fields in the neighbourhood of Thurles and, even though this had all to be done surreptitiously there was an active and well-organised Irish Volunteer unit in the district by the winter of 1916.

As 1917 progressed a certain amount of recruiting for the Volunteers was done. Most of the men who were then enrolled were only allowed into the ranks after being screened. Feiseanna, aeriochta and other forms of Gaelic League activity were organised, but not openly as Irish Volunteer functions. Concerts in aid of the Prisoners' Dependants helped to spread

sympathy for the movement and also to wean people away from supporting the constitutional movement led by the Redmonds, Dillon, William O'Brien and Tim Healy. Any opportunities for securing arms or military equipment were not allowed to go abegging.

In the Thurles area at that period a considerable quantity of explosives were stored in Molloy's magazine in the town. Quarries throughout mid-Tipperary obtained all their blasting supplies from this magazine. After consideration by the prominent Volunteers around Thurles it was decided that we should raid the magazine and seize its contents. The planning of the operation was entrusted to myself. It was a simple enough job because there was no guard of any kind over the place. This raid occurred, I think, in June 1917. I selected the men who were to take part after a good deal of thought as to their suitability. At that time I had not much to guide me as none of the local Volunteers had gone through anything that would serve as a test. In any event, I picked about ten men and of these I can now remember <sup>Tom</sup> Tom and Con O'Keeffe, Phil Fitzgerald, Paddy <sup>Kinnane</sup> Kinnane, Seamus and Thomas Malone, Jack Meagher (my brother-in-law) and Ned O'Reilly from Rossmore company in South Tipperary.

I got the keys of the magazine from "Mixey" Connell who worked in Molloy's. We had to scale a few high walls to get into the yard, but after that it was just a question of opening the magazine door and getting out the stuff. The raid took place around midnight. The material seized included blasting powder, fuse and detonators, as well as nearly half a ton of gelignite. It all had to be carried for about two miles to a point where we got a horse and cart to take it to the Ragg district, where it was concealed for the night under cocks of hay in a meadow that was being saved.

Some of the men had to carry up to a hundredweight of gelignite over that journey. On the following evening and night we removed all the material from the meadow to Kylanna graveyard and there stored it in a vault owned by William P. Hanley of Lanespark. This vault had not been used for a long time and we experienced difficulty in opening the door. Eventually I stood back and raced against it. The door yielded and I found myself inside the vault among broken coffins and a number of skeletons. It proved a safe hiding place and was used while we were dividing the material into small lots for distribution throughout Mid-Tipperary in the ensuing couple of months.

In the following August or September, Tomas and Seamus Malone, who were Irish teachers in the Thurles district, conceived the idea of disarming a party of five or six R.I.C. constables then guarding a boycotted farmer in Drumbane. The policemen went back and forward from their post in Drumbane to the farm and the Malones proposed that the disarming should be accomplished by rushing the police, overpowering and wresting the guns from them. I did not agree with this plan as the police were all hefty and trained men, physically and militarily, and had a big advantage over a group of 10 or 12 country lads selected by the Malones, most of whom were of light physique with no experience of dealing with a situation of this kind. Against my own judgment I did form one of the party who waited on a couple of occasions to disarm these policemen. They did not come along, perhaps because word reached the barracks that the attack was planned. After a few abortive attempts to waylay this R.I.C. party, the project was abandoned.

The death of Thomas Ashe, as a result of the Mountjoy hunger strike, occurred shortly after the projected disarming

of the R.I.C. at Drumbane, and Seamus Malone and myself went to Dublin for the funeral. We were attired in Volunteer uniform and wore side arms. I had a big sword at my side, while Malone had a bayonet which I had given him. I think we were the only two at the funeral who carried such arms and at the graveside we formed part of the guard. Next day (Monday) I returned to Thurles where a parade was held, as far as I remember, in protest against the manner in which Thomas Ashe had met his death. Similar parades took place all over the country, but this was definitely the biggest demonstration which I had ever witnessed in Thurles. As well as the Irish Volunteers, everybody in the town and surrounding districts turned out. The procession marched through the main streets past the R.I.C. barracks and back to the Square where it was dismissed.

I wore my uniform at this parade and apparently the police noted the fact, because, about a week later, I was arrested and charged with wearing a military uniform on two occasions - at Ashe's funeral and on the following day in Thurles - and also with illegal drilling. My trial took place before a military court in Cork Jail. Needless to say, I was convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment. Along with half a dozen other prisoners I was transferred from Cork to Mountjoy Jail a few days after my trial. On reaching Mountjoy we found about 30 Dublin men there before us, but the Cork crowd kept to themselves and went on hunger strike soon after arriving. The Dublin men followed suit. In a week or so we were all released under the "Cat and Mouse Act". This meant that we could be called upon at any time to serve the unexpired portions of our sentences.

On my return home from Mountjoy I went back to my work in Thurles. The local Irish Volunteer company was being

reorganised at the time and this resulted in an election of officers. I was chosen as captain of the company. I would say that this occurred in November 1917.

In the period after July 1917, when the prisoners arrested after the Easter Rising in 1916 were all finally released from jails in England, and public drilling and open recruitment for the Irish Volunteers started, there was a huge increase in the strength of the organisation in the next three or four months. As a result, it became necessary to form several new companies in mid-Tipperary and, by the end of the year, I think we had a company in every parish. These companies were all working directly under G.H.Q. in Dublin which, of course, was a most unwieldy arrangement. The position which then existed in our district applied also to most of the country and ultimately led to G.H.Q. parcelling out the country into battalion areas and, soon after, into brigade areas.

As far as my memory serves me, I would say that the formation of battalions took place towards the end of 1917 or very early in 1918. The district around Thurles was organised into one battalion and roughly covered the area which, later on, became known as the No. 2 (or Mid-Tipperary) Brigade.

I attach to this statement a map, Appendix I, in which the Mid-Tipperary Brigade area is shown. In Appendix 2, I give a list of the companies which comprised the original Thurles battalion and the names of the captains of each company. In Appendix 2 I also give the names of the staff of the original Thurles battalion, while Appendix 3 shows the personnel of the brigade and battalion staff in the period from the establishment of the brigade to the Truce. I would place the formation of the No. 2 Tipperary Brigade as having occurred during the Spring of 1918.

Side by side with the development of the Irish Volunteer movement from about July 1917, the political side - Sinn Fein - made rapid strides throughout the country. Sinn Fein clubs began to come into existence in August 1917 and they spread quickly until a club existed in every parish. Most of the work in establishing Sinn Fein clubs fell on the Volunteers, especially the officers. In actual fact, the backbone and most of the members of each club were the Volunteers themselves. The majority of the older generation, while sympathetic, remained outside the organisation until 1920 when they started to come into the Sinn Fein clubs in large numbers and, by the time the Truce came in July 1921, it could fairly be said that the political side was most comprised of the older people. Personally, I did not take a very active interest in the political end at any time, as I had as much as I could cope with in dealing with the affairs of the Volunteers and later the I.R.A.

On 1st March 1918, I was still employed by "Mixey" O'Connell in Thurles. That morning, a party of four R.I.C., including the local Head Constable, arrived in the shop and informed me that I was to be taken into custody. At that time the British authorities decided to re-arrest all the prisoners, who had been previously released under the "Cat and Mouse Act", as a prelude to the enforcement of conscription in Ireland.

My boss was in bed at the time the police called and I requested permission to be allowed to go upstairs to tell him that I was being sent back to jail. The Head Constable agreed to this, but sent one of the police upstairs with me. As we were coming back into the shop I opened the door at the foot of the stairs and held it open to enable my guard to go into the shop in front of me. He did so and I banged the door after him and dashed out the back door which I slammed after me.

I ran as fast as I could towards the bridge which crosses the

River Suir in the town, pursued by the police. On reaching the bridge I ran down the Mall and from there I jumped into the river to get across to the college grounds. The police in the meantime had divided their forces; the Head Constable kept on my tracks, two others got into the college grounds, while the fourth man was dispatched to the barracks for reinforcements. As I was half way across the river I saw the two policemen waiting to receive me on the college side and I then turned back again towards the Mall. By this time, news of the chase had spread through the town and a crowd of about 30 had gathered on the Mall side of the river. They were mostly Volunteers among them being Jack Feehan, one of the captains of the Thurles companies. The crowd held up the Head Constable and Feehan handed me a bike which he had. I quickly mounted the machine and rode off into the country. Just outside the town I got rid of the bike and went through the fields to Tuohy's in Cabra. There I got a change of clothes and sat down to a meal which I was able to enjoy as I watched the police on bikes setting out for my home in Tubberadura. After that I had to go 'on the run'.

On the night of my escape a concert had been arranged in the Confraternity Hall under the auspices of the Volunteers in Thurles. Arrangements for the concert were in the hands of Sean McLoughlin, a Dublin man, who had been sent down from G.H.Q. to Tipperary as an organiser and drill instructor. The hall was packed to overflowing and, as it was expected that the R.I.C. might try to break up the entertainment or attempt to search the place for me, Volunteers took up positions in the outside yard, equipped with hurleys, pick handles and other such implements, to resist any police intrusion. However, the police did not bother and the concert was a big success.

After the concert, McLoughlin joined me 'on the run'. He had fought in the Rising in Dublin and was wellknown as a Volunteer officer to the British authorities. In view of their decision to re-arrest me, he came to the conclusion that they might do the same to him. Hence his decision to go 'on the run'.

The conscription crisis was reaching its height at this time and caused a further influx of recruits into the ranks of the Volunteers. In the town of Thurles, which had a population of about 5,500, the strength of the Volunteers reached 800. It was no small job to cope with the considerably enlarged companies in every parish in Mid-Tipperary. The companies, in order to facilitate drilling and other aspects of administration, were sub-divided into sections, each of which had its own commander, a rank roughly equivalent to a sergeant in the regular army. In addition to a weekly company parade for drill, the Volunteers also met on other nights by sections to be drilled by their own commanders. It was not always easy to get men to accept these posts as lots of the lads were too shy to come out to drill their neighbours from the same and neighbouring townlands, and besides, only a few of them were competent to do so at that stage. McLoughlin and myself moved about the brigade area from company to company training and drilling the units ourselves and giving lectures to the officers. We also put the companies through exercises in manœuvres.

While all this was going on, the political action to resist conscription and to improve the strength of the Sinn Fein organisation was becoming intensified. Anti-conscription meetings were held in every town and village. Big rallies of Sinn Fein supporters were addressed by prominent leaders of the movement, who mostly came down from Dublin. As I was 'on the run' I could not openly take part in all this political

activity, a reason which also prevented me from being present at a great Sinn Fein meeting held in Thurles in August or September 1918, that was addressed by Arthur Griffith and Father O'Flanagan, and at a Sinn Fein Convention held after meeting when candidates were selected to contest the General Election which was held in December 1918.

The British decided that their R.I.C. strength in the area required reinforcements and the Fever Hospital in Thurles was commandeered and occupied by a military garrison during the summer of 1918. This post was held until the Truce in July 1921.

I believe it was early in the summer of 1918 that the first shooting in the War of Independence took place in Mid-Tipperary. Sean McLoughlin sent Tom Meagher, Annfield, with a dispatch to Liam Manahan, then O/C. of the Galtee Battalion. As Meagher was approaching the village of Drumbane cycling down a steep hill, he ran into a mixed party of R.I.C. and soldiers under the command of District Inspector Hunt. Meagher was called upon to halt, but did not do so. He was fired at and wounded in the arm. He managed to control the bike until he got round a bend and up a laneway into the farmhouse of Michael Dwyer, Ballyoughter. Discarding the bike, he ran into the house where a number of people had gathered to attend a special Mass which was being celebrated by Fr. O'Donoghue. His entry caused a bit of excitement and his condition was noticed by the priest who thereupon stopped the ceremony and helped Meagher to get through a window into the refe of the house and from there on to the fields across the country until he reached Michael Ryan's (Cleary), Glenree, four miles away. In Ryan's, his wound was dressed and he was put to bed where he remained for four or five days, receiving attention from Dr. Barry, Thurles. The wound responded well to treatment and, on going home from Ryan's, he became all right.

On the Sunday evening after Tom Meagher had gone home a number of his friends called to see him. He was still in bed, of course. Among the visitors was Jack Feehan, company captain in Thurles. Feehan was sitting at the head of the bed chatting with the patient and the latter's brother, Jack, who was sitting opposite Feehan at the other end of the bed. Jack Meagher was examining a .38 revolver which was loaded. He accidentally discharged a shot which wounded Feehan in the leg. Dr. Barry was also brought to attend him. On the doctor's order Feehan was brought to Thurles Hospital that night, but the wound proved an obstinate one and the doctor recommended further treatment by a specialist in Dublin.

In order to avoid the attention of the R.I.C., who always had a couple of detectives watching trains leaving and arriving in Thurles, special arrangements had to be made to get Feehan aboard the train for Dublin. It was fixed up with the driver to stop the train after leaving Thurles station opposite the hospital. The arrangement worked smoothly and Feehan arrived safely at his destination, which I think was the Mater Hospital, Dublin.

About the same time as these two shootings took place, I had a narrow shave from arrest and death, and it was also the first occasion when I came under fire from British forces. I was at Meagher's in Annefield participating in a high jump contest with Edward Meagher in a field outside the house when, suddenly, Edward drew my attention to a cycling patrol of police and military on the road about 30 yards away. We both dashed for the opposite fence 60 or 70 yards distant. Meagher got over the fence in a flying leap with me at his heels. Just as I was dropping into the field on the other side, a burst of rifle fire from the road sent bullets flying above my head. We both ran in opposite directions under cover of the

hedge. I got across the Clodiah River and made through the fields to Barracurragh. Meagher went on for about 100 yards until he reached Butler's who was a friend of his. There he changed his shoes and socks and then coolly walked back to his own house. The police and soldiers were scattered about the place. They held him up, searched him and then inquired if he had seen any fellows running through the fields. He said he had and told them that the fleeing men had gone in a different direction to that which I had taken. Soldiers then got on top of gate piers to get a better view of the country and began firing with the rifles about the countryside. Nobody was hit by this reckless shooting, and after twenty minutes or so the patrol departed.

Other incidents of note which happened in the latter half of 1918 in the brigade area were the seizure of shotguns and ammunition and the General Election. All the big houses owned by members of the Ascendancy class were raided by the Volunteers for arms and, in addition, the hardware shops of Molloy's and Fitzpatrick's in Thurles were visited and all the stocks of shotguns and ammunition were removed. In those two shops the staffs were mostly members of the Thurles company and with their connivance the premises were entered on a Sunday night. Between both premises, about 22 shotguns were taken and so much ammunition that the whole lot formed quite a load on a horse cart which was used to take it away.

The General Election produced a contest in East Tipperary between Pierce McCann (Sinn Fein) and Tom Condon, the outgoing member of the Irish Parliamentary Party. All the energies of the Volunteers were thrown into this fight as Condon was a popular man in the area and had a strong personal following. Volunteers canvassed on behalf of McCann, collected funds, guarded his meetings, acted as personating agents on Polling

day and made arrangements for transport or drove motor cars and other vehicles to take the voters to the booths. I came out in public during the election campaign under the eyes of the police, but they made no attempt to arrest me. On polling day I was on duty all day at the booths in Boherlahan and Ardmoyle and was in charge of a party of Volunteers who escorted the ballot boxes into Cashel that night along with an escort of R.I.C. The result of the contest was: McCann - 7487 Votes; Condon 4794 Votes.

After going to Cashel with the ballot boxes I decided to go that night on my bike to Meagher's of Annefield. I was only about ten minutes in the place when the house was raided by a force of R.I.C. who took me into custody. After being first taken to the local barracks which was then in Drombane Hall, I was then shifted to Thurles and transferred next day to Belfast jail. One of the Meaghers (Jack), who was also an active Volunteer, was arrested with me. When he saw the police coming into the house he tried to stop them with a pitchfork. This, of course, was an offence with which he was later tried in Cork jail and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

In Belfast Prison were men from all parts of Ireland including some of the most prominent figures in the republican movement - Austin Stack and Ernest Blythe. Stack was chosen as our leader. I was only about a week there when we decided to smash up the building. I cannot recollect now why we resorted to this action, but everything which was breakable was made into smithereens. Doors, windows and even the slates on the roofs were broken up. The staircase was so smashed that we were in complete isolation on the top floor for about eight days. The food problem was got over in a sort of way by getting the prisoners to leave untouched whatever parcels of food they received from home in the weeks preceding the outbreak, but indeed, by the time the row was over the rations were extremely scanty. Military and police who were drafted

into the prison to restore order failed to dislodge us from our position and, eventually, the prison authorities brought in Cardinal McRory and the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Larry O'Neill who conducted negotiations between our leaders and the authorities which led to the termination of the outbreak.

Peace did not reign for long, however, as only a week later a prisoner named Tommy Fitzpatrick, a native of Armagh who, at the time was not quite mentally normal, assaulted one of the warders. The incident was one which happened as a result of a sudden impulse on Fitzpatrick's part. The authorities, however, seized on this as an excuse to treat us all as criminal offenders and to deprive us of the political status which had been accorded following the mediation of Cardinal McRory and Lord Mayor O'Neill. We declined to accept this decision of the authorities and forthwith resorted to the methods employed in the previous protest. This time we bored passages from one cell to another. A strong force of troops was brought into the prison and succeeded in having each prisoner overpowered and handcuffed. I was one of about a dozen who came in for special punishment. Our hands were handcuffed behind our backs and we were allowed to remain in our cells in that state for about ten days.

A good many of the men confined in Belfast at the time were, like myself, serving unexpired portions of sentences imposed prior to being released under the "Cat and Mouse Act". Some of them had only short periods to serve, but it was noticed that on completing their sentences they were rearrested as soon as they got outside the jail and deported to England. Austin Stack and a few others were treated in that manner. My own sentence was nearing completion and I gave thought to a plan which would enable me to circumvent the deportation proceedings. I had pleurisy about a year before and considered

that it should be easy for me to develop a heavy cold and a high temperature. I therefore decided to lie down naked on the stone floor of the cell one night. The trick worked and soon I was considered to be so ill that I was removed to hospital. The prison doctor, O'Flaherty, was a decent class of man and I believe it was on his recommendation that I was discharged three days before my time was up; he also gave me a certificate of unfitness in case there should be an attempt made to have me deported. Five or six others were released with me, including Jack O'Sheehan of Dublin. It was then about the first week in June 1919.

On my return to Tipperary I called to see "Mixey" O'Connell in Thurles and he told me all about what had taken place in the county during my absence in prison, particularly in connection with the attack on the police in Solohead Beg and the rescue of Sean Hogan at Knocklong station. Both of these operations took place in the 3rd (South) Tipperary Brigade area, but O'Connell had co-operated in the latter. His account to me of these incidents and the part played by himself agreed in every way with the description given by Dan Breen, one of the principal figures in both events in his book "My fight for Irish Freedom".

I strongly advised O'Connell to clear out of the town, pointing out to him that the police would find out that he had been implicated, but he did not take my advice. I stayed with him that night. Next morning lots of my friends called to see me and among those who came in was an ex-British soldier who had two automatic pistols, a "Peter the Painter" and a long parabellum which he offered to sell for a couple of pounds.

I knew the man well and bought the guns from him. I hid them in a recess beside the gas meter in O'Connell's shop where we usually hid anything of that kind, but I warned O'Connell not

to go to bed that night with the guns in the house.

Unfortunately, my warning went unheeded and before the following morning the police raided the premises. The two guns were discovered and O'Connell was arrested on a charge of having firearms in his possession. The authorities were glad to get this chance because they strongly suspected that O'Connell was involved in the Knocklong rescue, but they were unable to procure any definite evidence against him.

I think it was on the day following the arrest of O'Connell that a few of the most active members of the brigade came to me with the proposal that the District Inspector of the R.I.C. in Thurles should be shot. His name was Hunt and he had for some time previously been very hostile towards the Volunteers and Sinn Fein supporters and led numerous raids and baton charges in the town. It was pointed out to me that if this man continued to do this with immunity it could have disastrous results for all of us and that his shooting would have a salutary effect on other policemen who might be inclined to follow his example. I agreed to the shooting. The facts were, however, that during my term in jail the proposal to shoot this officer was put up to "Mixey" O'Connell, who was acting brigade commander, and he agreed. All the plans had thus been ready to do the job. As I had resumed charge of the brigade in the meantime my approval was then necessary.

It had been arranged that the shooting should be carried out next day while Hunt would be attending the Thurles races. It was not found possible to get a suitable chance while he was on the racecourse, but the three men who had been trailing him kept on his tracks on the way back to the town. Hunt was walking along the road in company with a couple of other policemen and, just as he reached the entrance to the Square, he was fired at and shot dead. The other police took to their heels.

towards the barracks. The men who actually fired the shots were Jim and Tommy Stapleton, first cousins, and Jim Murphy (The "Jennett"). The Stapletons came from Finnaboy, Upperchurch, and Murphy belonged to Curreeney, Kilcommon.

For some hours after the shooting the police appeared to be a bit nervous, but as the evening wore on and they got intoxicated, their fury began to show itself. They confined themselves mainly to beating up anyone whom they could get their hands on, especially any supporter of Sinn Fein. I was working behind the counter in O'Connell's bar that evening when the Head Constable came in. He was a good sort and was advanced in years. The poor man had no interest in the actions of his colleagues outside on the streets, nor indeed did he approve of them. He readily accepted a glass of whiskey which I proffered and then went out. All the publichouses in the town were closed at about 7 p.m.

The shooting of D.I. Hunt took place on 23rd June 1919, and the Government at once proclaimed martial law in the Thurles district. The R.I.C. in the town were reinforced and armed parties of police and military, varying in strength from six to nine men, patrolled the town and surrounding districts day and night. While there was no armed retaliation on our part, the spirit of the republican movement was in no way cowed by the enemy's display of force. Scarcely a day passed without some kind of incident happening which caused annoyance to the British forces. The tricolour, which was anathema to them, especially the R.I.C., would be hoisted and there would be an instant rush to have it removed. Jeering of the police by the civilian population was always a weak point with the authorities and this was widely resorted to. The jostling of soldiers off the footpaths while off duty and an occasional beating of the soldiers helped to keep matters lively.

Eventually, in September 1919, all fairs and markets in the area were proclaimed and the police began to resort to new tactics against the supporters of the republican cause. They began by breaking the windows of Charles Culhane, Chairman of the Thurles Sinn Fein Club and an active Volunteer. This happened at 11 o'clock at night while the police were out on patrol.

During these exciting times the usual mobilisations of the Volunteers took place, though precautions had to be taken to guard against surprise by the police and soldiers. Scouts were always posted to watch out for raids while drilling was in progress. In no instance was a mobilisation interrupted despite all the vigilance of the R.I.C.

One day in October or November 1919, I happened to go across the street from O'Connell's shop when I heard that the R.I.C. were after arresting a few of the leading figures in the republican movement in Thurles. I was about to return to the shop when I saw the police surrounding the place. A crowd had gathered to watch the proceedings and from the outside of the crowd I looked on for a few minutes. I had no desire to go back to jail and I cleared out of the town forthwith to go 'on the run' again. Between that and the Truce I was a wanted man by the British authorities but, of course, I made frequent secret visits to Thurles and O'Connell's house during that period.

It can be truly stated that by that time the "King's Writ" had almost ceased to function in the rural parts of Mid-Tipperary. The R.I.C. were no longer looked upon as a police force. The Irish Volunteers, now known as the I.R.A., were beginning to be regarded as the custodians of law and order by the majority of the people. At such gatherings as

sports meetings and na feiseanna, there had for some time been a good deal of friction with the police over the question of payment for admission. Hitherto, of course, the police were always admitted free of charge and they were expected to deal with any breaches of the peace which might take place. Now, they were no longer wanted as the I.R.A. were available to deal with any trouble. Things came to a climax at a feis in The Ragg late in 1919. The R.I.C. were after forcing their way into the field where the feis was being held. I got an I.R.A. party together and tackled the police and threw them out of the grounds again. That very same night we had made plans to shoot a police sergeant named Murphy in Kilcommon. The men selected met at Meagher's in Annefield and included Tomas and Seamus Malone. We cycled to Kilcommon during the evening but, on reaching there, learned from the local I.R.A. men, at whose invitation we were doing the job, that the sergeant had been injured that day in the course of some row and that it was unlikely he would be out that night. We waited, hoping that he might show up, but he did not do so. Sergeant Murphy was transferred from Kilcommon about a week later. He was a bitter opponent of the republican movement and had been responsible for the arrest and sentence of Joseph McDonagh some time previously. The charge against McDonagh was one of having made a seditious speech at Rearcross.

About the end of 1919, G.H.Q. issued an order forbidding any armed attacks on British forces without the prior sanction of the brigade commander of the area. This had become necessary as in certain cases attacks had been carried out by Volunteers acting on their own initiative which were ill-planned and harmful, resulting in the deaths of good men or causing bigger and more important operations to be abandoned. There was also the danger that some hasty Volunteer, wishing to make a name for himself, might shoot a friendly member of

the enemy forces who was doing useful work for our intelligence people. In my own brigade there was no occasion to complain about activities of this kind, but they were happening in other parts of the country.

Early in January 1920, at a brigade council meeting, held in O'Connell's in Thurles, the question of attacking R.I.C. barracks came up for discussion. It was decided there that on the night of 18th January some form of attack should be made on each barracks in the brigade area. There were 18 such posts altogether and some of them were so located that, except by a ruse, there was not an earthly hope of capturing them. In only two places - Holycross and Drombane Hall - did we entertain any hope of success and, so far as the other posts were concerned, they were simply to be sniped. We anticipated that the sniping operations would confine the police to their stations while Holycross and Drombane were under assault. Again, there was a feeling of uneasiness in the ranks of the R.I.C. because of the growing resistance of the I.R.A. to their powers and an odd shot fired at their strongholds, especially at night time, had a nuisance value from our point of view, which was very well worth while with the few rounds of ammunition that were expended.

The attack on Holycross barracks was under the control of Jerry Ryan, Q/C. 1st Battalion. He had about 20 men armed with rifles and shotguns in positions around the barracks for the purpose of preventing the police from coming out or firing from the windows of the barracks. He hoped to capture the building by burning it or blowing away the gable. In order to burn it he had planned to get a few men on to the roof by means of a ladder. Once access to the roof was obtained, the men, equipped with hammers, would break slates and through the holes thus created fling bottles filled with petrol or

paraffin oil, followed by home made bombs to set the inside of the barracks alight. Due to the fact that the ladder which had been procured was not long enough to enable men to climb on to the roof, this idea did not work out and had to be abandoned.

Everything then depended on the success of the attempt to blow away the gable. For this a land mine, prepared by Dick Quinn and Tom Hanrahan, and charged with some of the gelignite which had been taken out of Molloy's magazine in Thurles during June 1917, was laid under the northern gable of the barracks. Our knowledge of explosives at this stage was very elementary indeed and due, no doubt, to the want of proper technical knowledge in the laying of the mine rather than any deficiency in its own destructive powers, the explosion resulted in splitting the gable from top to bottom. The attack, which began about 11 p.m., was called off around 1 a.m. next morning. During this period the men equipped with rifles and shotguns had been firing at the barrack windows and the police kept up a brisk return fire, sending up Verey lights at intervals to attract reinforcements. After the failure of the mine to do what was expected of it, Ryan called off the attack. As far as I can remember, there were no casualties among the police, who numbered about 12 men; nor did the attacking party have any either.

The attack on the police post in Drumbane Hall was under the command of Jim Stapleton who had a force of about 20 men under him, all drawn from the 3rd battalion. This was a one-storey building which had been commandeered by the British authorities early in 1919 and garrisoned by R.I.C. to deal with a rather violent outbreak of agrarian trouble in connection with the Hanley Estate. The ground around the post had been cleared of walls and fences with the result that the

nearest cover available for the rifle and shotgun-men engaged in the assault was nearly 100 yards away.

Stapleton had prepared a land mine, charged also with gelignite, which he reckoned would completely shatter the southern gable and perhaps destroy the greater part of the structure or, at any rate, leave the interior of the building open to the fire of his riflemen. The explosion was more successful in the case of Drumbane. It blew away most of the gable but the garrison grimly held out, sending up Verey lights from time to time, and returning the fire until after four hours of assault Stapleton decided to withdraw. The attack began around 11 o'clock at night and finished shortly after 3 o'clock next morning. Neither side sustained any casualties.

There were hundreds of other Volunteers from the 1st and 3rd Battalions occupied in erecting barricades on the roads leading to Holycross and Drumbane during the early part of the night of 18th January 1920. While the attacks were in progress, the R.I.C. barracks in Barnane, Borrisoleigh, Roskeen and Templetohy were sniped, one or two riflemen supported by a couple of men armed with shotguns being engaged in each place. These were purely diversionary actions so as to confuse the enemy as to which place reinforcements should be sent. Such was the state of tension among the R.I.C. at the time that a few shots fired at a barracks was sufficient to cause them to throw up Verey lights to attract help and to keep them on the alert for the whole night recklessly firing their rifles at imaginary attackers.

An immediate development after the attacks in Holycross and Drumbane was that every R.I.C. barracks in Mid-Tipperary had its defences strengthened. Loopholes were broken at points

of vantage in the walls, the windows steel-shuttered, sandbagged protection was placed outside the doors, while elaborate barbed wire entanglements were fixed around the walls and approaches to the buildings.

Some time prior to these attacks, the R.I.C. vacated their station in Newtown and the building was burned soon after by the local I.R.A. company.

The Brigade Council meeting, which decided on the operations I have already described, considered that I should take no actual part in any of them. O'Connell's business, which I was managing at the time, had been left in a neglected state by the owner at the time of his arrest. His wife was dead and the business had suffered a great deal because of the attention which he had been giving to the Volunteer movement rather than to his own personal affairs. He was a man who had endeared himself to every Sinn Fein supporter in the county and though, personally, I would have much preferred to be in action with the men of my brigade on the night of 18th January, I acceded to the wishes of the Brigade Council.

That night, I made it my business to be seen by the Thurles police about the town so that they would come to the conclusion that I had nothing to do with the attacks. I think it was on the following day or the day after that one of these police, Constable Finnegan, called on me at O'Connell's and told me that they knew in the barracks which of the Thurles Volunteers were out that night and that these men would be rounded up in a few days. This Constable Finnegan knew everyone in Thurles well as he was the policeman who dealt with the sugar ration cards during the First Great War. For some time previous to his visit to me he had shown himself to be very hostile to the republican movement and was known to us to have been busy

making inquiries concerning the activities of members of the I.R.A. in the town. After Finnegan's conversation with me, I had a chat with another of his colleagues, Sergeant Hurley, who was friendly towards the I.R.A. and from time to time gave valuable information to us. The sergeant told me that Finnegan was compiling a list of men whom he suspected of being involved in the recent attacks on the R.I.C. barracks. I decided it was time to put Constable Finnegan out of action.

On the night of 20th January 1921, Jerry Ryan, Mick Small and John McCarthy (Goorty) and myself, all armed with revolvers, watched for Constable Finnegan in the vicinity of his own home in the Mall. He was returning from the barracks at about 10 o'clock and was about 10 yards from his house when we fired at him. He was badly wounded and died the following morning.

Later that night the R.I.C. and military ran amok in the town. They fired shots at random and went through the streets discharging shots through the doors and windows of the houses and business places of Sinn Fein supporters. On the following day the English Labour Party "Fact Finding Commission", headed by Mr. Clynes, arrived in Thurles and were able to see first-hand the depredations caused by the British garrison on the night before and to observe the state of terror which the incidents created among the civilian population. I went out into the Mall and there met Mr. Clynes and his colleagues and gave them a lot of information they wanted. After that, they visited a number of the damaged houses and examined everything in detail. They came into "Mixey" O'Connell's place which was badly wrecked and were shown the bullet-riddled room in which his maid and baby slept. Statements were taken from several people who had been eyewitnesses to the behaviour of the police and soldiers.

All the members of the delegation appeared to be anxious to get as much detail as possible, and the townspeople, including myself, felt that the report on their visit would have some effect on the British Government. But, so far as could afterwards been seen, nothing came from it at all, and, as certain events proved soon afterwards, the R.I.C. and soldiers did not pay the slightest heed to Mr. Clynes and his friends.

On 24th February 1920, the people of Thurles woke in the morning to find that during the previous night the doors of houses of a number of Sinn Fein supporters had been painted with the letters R.I.P. It was known that this was done by the police and not much heed was paid to what was generally regarded as an act of vandalism rather than a portent of murderous consequences.

At that particular time, strong patrols of police and military went around the town of Thurles by day and night. It was decided to attack the patrol at night time. This was a risky kind of operation because on some nights two different patrols moved through the town. It was noticed by our scouts, who had been making a note of the enemy's movements, that the patrol usually rested at the Market House for about an hour. The attack was planned to take place here. Our men would use the lanes in the vicinity as firing points. The operation was to be under my own control and I proposed to use about 25 men, including some experienced Volunteers from 3rd Battalion, among them Jim Stapleton. I had asked the latter to come into Thurles early in the night as there were some details regarding the attack that I did not wish to decide on finally until I had consulted him.

Stapleton, travelling in company with Paddy O'Brien,

Silvermines, and Jim Larkin, Uppercurch, was on the way into Thurles when he and his companions called into Larry Fanning's publichouse in The Ragg for a drink. They were not long inside when two R.I.C. men named Henue and Flaherty came in, apparently for refreshments also. On the spur of the moment, the I.R.A. trio decided to attack the police and so opened fire with revolvers. Constable Flaherty managed to escape, but Henue was shot dead as he was trying to get inside the counter. This shooting upset my plans for the attack on the night patrol and obliged me to abandon it.

The shooting in The Ragg led to widespread raiding by police and military around Thurles and its neighbourhood. Enemy patrols were increased and became very vigilant in the ensuing weeks. On the night of 27.3.1920, a party of R.I.C. went to raid McCarthy's in the Mall at about 1.30 a.m. Four of this family were members of the I.R.A. One of them, Jimmy, went to open the door for the raiders and, as soon as he had done so, they shot him dead. On the succeeding night, another party of masked R.I.C. men from Thurles barracks raided the house of Tom Dwyer in The Ragg and shot him dead in his bedroom in the presence of his sister, a young widow. Dwyer, who was also an I.R.A. man, had been seen talking to Stapleton and his companions a short time before the attack on the police in Fanning's pub earlier in the month.

On the same night that Dwyer was shot, the R.I.C. force concerned attacked the shop and home of Richard Small, The Ragg. His son, Mick Small, vice-commandant of the 1st Battn., was then one of the most prominent members of our brigade. The R.I.C., masked also, threw a number of bombs into the house and wrecked the front portion of the premises.

Both Jimmy McCarthy and Tom Dwyer were given military funerals. About a dozen of the most prominent and active

Volunteers in the brigade, equipped with rifles, were formed into a temporary 'flying column' to be present at these funerals. McCarthy was buried at Holycross where a firing party discharged volleys over his grave. Next day I went with the 'flying column', which was armed with rifles, to Bouladuff where Dwyer's body was being waked. I placed the column behind a wall in front of the wake-house with instructions to keep the place covered but not to fire without my orders. I was in the house when a party of R.I.C. under District Inspector Goulding of Thurles arrived in a tender. With a Head Constable the D.I. was about to enter as I stepped out the door wearing a revolver in a holster which was clearly visible to the police. The D.I. and I stared at each other, but he made no attempt to interfere, nor did any of the rest of the police. I don't think they were aware of the presence of the column who were waiting for my signal to open fire. The body was brought to the church that night. Next day, without firearms, we accompanied the remains to within a quarter mile of the graveyard and then fell out of the procession. The military had taken possession of the graveyard and the firing of volleys over the grave was postponed until midnight when the soldiers had gone and the ceremony could be carried out in peace.

After having paid our last military compliments to Dwyer, the armed group of a dozen riflemen which had been brought together, went with me to Rathcannon where we had a consultation with Ned O'Reilly, a prominent officer in the South Tipperary Brigade, about the possibilities of bringing off an ambush in Rathcannon where there was a good position for this purpose. Clonoulty R.I.C. barracks was not far away and we considered that if O'Reilly would agree to fire at the post, which was in his area, there was a chance that reinforcements might be sent which we might attack. O'Reilly fell in with our ideas and on

the night of 1.4.1920, with some of his men he blazed away at the barracks with rifle fire for the greater part of the night, but no reinforcements came along.

On our part we had gone to a lot of trouble to meet the reinforcements and tried out a new idea for the occasion. The local company was mobilised to dig a trench about 5 ft. deep and 15 ft. long across the road. This was covered with canvas camouflaged overhead with road dust, a trap which we hoped might put out of action at least one lorry load of police or military and perhaps a second lorry, because at that time, when they were in a hurry, enemy vehicles did not travel in the extended formation that they resorted to at a later period. I had the men that I brought with me posted in positions commanding this trench.

During March 1920, the R.I.C. in Loughmore and Moyne were withdrawn and, on the night of 3.4.1920, the vacated barracks were burned by the local I.R.A. companies.

In the 3rd Battalion area the R.I.C. posts were being sniped very frequently with the encouragement of the brigade staff by small groups of I.R.A. men under the direction of the very energetic Jimmy Stapleton. I have no idea of how often or of the dates on which these operations took place. As a result of one of them - the sniping of Roskeen barracks on 7.4.1920 - military reinforcements were sent out from Thurles. The enemy move was anticipated by the attackers who had a few men posted to fire at them from Rossmult Wood. While a good deal of shooting followed (nearly all of which was wild firing by the military) the I.R.A. snipers in the wood kept pegging away with odd shots until eventually the British troops moved off. I can't remember if any of the soldiers were hit, but our men lost only a couple of dozen rounds of ammunition

expended during the engagement, while the enemy wasted thousands of rounds. Such kind of actions kept the enemy guessing all the time while our lads preserved their initiative and enjoyed the demoralising annoyance suffered by their opponents.

On the night that this encounter was in progress I was on my way towards Newport in the No. 1 Tipperary Brigade area with Paddy Kinnane, Jerry Ryan, Jim and Tommy Stapleton and Mick Small to help units of the local I.R.A. to attack an R.I.C patrol next day. The weather was very bad indeed at the time. I had left Littleton earlier in the day with Jerry Ryan and Small to go to Upperchurch where we met the others - Kinnane and the two Stapletons. From Upperchurch we went in the pitch dark of a pouring night along the side of a hill to Kilcommon where we rested for a while in the home of Pat Doherty, then the battalion commander in that area. We had a meal there and declined an offer to have our clothes dried as we would be as wet as ever before arriving at our destination - Paddy Ryan's (Lacken) house in Knockfine, 7 or 8 miles away. Ryan, Small and myself had already trudged about 16 miles. Doherty took us the remainder of the journey in a horse and cart. In Ryan's we went to bed for a few hours, but not without having a 'nightcap' - a big measure of poteen. About 5 o'clock that morning we were aroused, but I was so ill that I was unable to get out of bed. Whether it was due to the wetting I had experienced on the trip from Littleton, or to the poteen to which I was unaccustomed, I cannot say, but I was a very sick man when the others left the house to go off to the ambush position in Lackanore.

The party I had brought from Mid-Tipperary were reinforced by 6 or 7 men from North Tipperary under Paddy Ryan (Lacken) on whose initiative the attack was planned. The attacking

force, equipped with rifles, revolvers and shotguns, had been brought together to ambush R.I.C. men who were expected to travel on bikes from Rearcross to a court in Newport. These two places are about 10 miles apart and Lackamore is about midway between them. The only details of the actual attack which I can give are that there were three policemen there and that two of them were killed, while the third man escaped. Two revolvers were captured by the attacking party who sustained no casualties. That evening I accompanied my own men back to Upperchurch, but it took me a week to recover from the effects of the trip.

In May 1920, men from my brigade took part in attacks on R.I.C. barracks in Hollyford, which was in the South Tipperary Brigade area, and Drangan in Co. Kilkenny. The operations were under the command of Ernie O'Malley, G.H.Q. staff, who was engaged in training and organising duties in Tipperary at the time. I did not take part in either attack. I had other things in mind - an operation involving an attack on Shevry police barracks and the problem of dealing with District Inspector Wilson, the R.I.C. officer in charge of the Templemore district.

A good deal of planning and preparations had been put into the projected attack on Shevry. I was in charge of everything myself and, assisting me in making the arrangements were Jim Stapleton and Paddy Kinnane, O/C. 3rd Battalion. The attacking party, about 40 strong, mobilised at Upperchurch on the evening of the intended attack. We had petrol and paraffin to remove to Shevry, also explosives, and before moving off from Upperchurch, two miles from our objective, I sent a section of six men under Jimmy Kinnane to occupy a position in Ballyboy on the road between Thurles and Shevry.

Information had come to us earlier that a lorry with rations and containing a mixed force of police and soldiers had passed up from Thurles to Shevry. We knew that this lorry would return to Thurles some time during the evening or shortly after nightfall. The total force travelling on it numbered 10 or 12 and we wanted to make sure it had gone out of the district before opening the attack on the barracks. My instructions to Jim Kinnane before he set out for Ballyboy were to attack any troops or police which would come out from Thurles towards Shevry and he was explicitly told not to interfere with the ration lorry on its return journey.

Some time after the departure of <sup>Jimmy</sup> Paddy Kinnane and his section, we moved off from Upperchurch. It was a beautiful summer night and we had no annoyance from cold or rain and we arrived at our destination without incident. A certain amount of progress had been made towards opening the attack when a lorry of troops arrived at the barracks. We waited, expecting the lorry would move off again but it did not do so. It looked then as if the enemy had got word of our intention to attack the police station. We were still in our positions as dawn approached. One of the party, Michael Small, captain of the Borrisoleigh Company, came up to me to inquire what I thought of the situation and I told him that it looked now as if the operation would have to be abandoned, as I would not attempt to start the fighting while the reinforcements were in barracks, and also that we needed the darkness to have any hope of success and to avoid casualties. Small then said: "In that case I'd like to go home as I have arranged to go to Communion this (Sunday) morning".

Small moved off after this conversation, but he had not gone very long when the lorry and its escort drove away from the barracks towards Thurles. Small was crossing a field when

he was seen and fired at by these troops. He was shot dead and his body was collected and brought in the lorry to Templemore. In charge of the lorry, though we did not know it at the time was District Inspector Wilson, the man we had been attempting to shoot for weeks previously.

About 4 o'clock in the morning I withdrew the attacking party from Shevry and went back to Upperchurch to disperse. There I heard the full facts explaining how the ration lorry happened to come back to Shevry. Despite the orders which had been given to the section which I had sent the previous evening to Ballyboy not to fire at the ration lorry, my orders were not adhered to and the vehicle was fired at. This alarmed the escort and caused them to return to Shevry so as to avoid travelling further in the darkness.

The inquest on Michael Small was held in the military barracks in Templemore. Jim Stapleton and myself attended it. From the evidence tendered it was clear that the firing which caused the death had been ordered by D.I. Wilson. The brigade staff decided that Small should be given a military funeral and hundreds of Volunteers fell-in for the parade which had been arranged to take place from outside the military hospital in Templemore. I took charge of the parade and was giving orders within sight of a sentry. A young military officer and the military doctor, Dr. Mitchell, Templemore, were standing beside the sentry watching the Volunteers being drilled. The officer grabbed the rifle from the sentry and was aiming to fire at me when Dr. Mitchell struck down the rifle and made the officer hand back the gun to the sentry. There was no further interference with the funeral and at the churchyard three volleys were fired over Small's grave. By the same token, the deceased was a first cousin of Mick Small, later commandant of the 1st Battalion and leader of the brigade flying column.

Previous to Small's death, District Inspector Wilson had been on our black books because of his ruthless conduct in the treatment of republicans. In fact, a couple of attempts had been made to shoot him before Small was killed. On at least three occasions ambushes were prepared to try and catch him coming from Courts, but something always happened to save him. For instance, a party waiting for him between Templemore and Borrisoleigh erected a barricade on the road to intercept him, but a party of soldiers came along first, causing that attempt to fail.

As a result of a discussion among some of the leading officers of the brigade after the shooting of Michael Small, the decision was taken to shoot Wilson at any cost and as soon as possible too. The carrying out of this decision proved to be a more difficult task than we anticipated. The first effort was made at Borrisoleigh where Wilson with a tender of police came to a Petty Sessions Court. Jim Stapleton with four or five men kept the officer under observation all day, but no suitable opportunity to shoot him presented itself. A couple of days later on, on the Templemore-Borrisoleigh Rd. Stapleton with the same party waited again at a spot selected by myself to ambush a van in which Wilson was expected to travel. The van came along all right, but it was accompanied by a big escort of police and soldiers and Stapleton had to sit tight.

Following all these abortive efforts to put an end to Wilson, we concluded that the best place to get him was inside the town of Templemore itself where he was stationed and lived. I took Jim Stapleton with me to make a reconnaissance of that town. We both had bikes, but we dumped the revolvers we carried on the outskirts of the town. We saw our man whom we

could have shot without any trouble. On the following day, in a motor car driven by Jack Ryan, a member of the Thurles company, we travelled from Thurles to Templemore. Along with me were Jim Stapleton, Jerry Ryan, Paddy Kinnane and a girl who is now my sister-in-law - Mrs. Frank McGrath, Nenagh - whom we brought with us as a blind. In Templemore we learned that Wilson had left town for the day, which happened to be a Saturday. We agreed among ourselves to leave the town and return again on the following Monday. The Templemore Volunteers to whom we had been speaking warned us that strong military parties were usually detailed to patrol the roads outside the town and that one of these patrols had actually gone out along the road by which we would be returning. To avoid trouble on the way back, we left our revolvers in Mick Kelly's, The Crescent, and then left the town. We had only gone a quarter of a mile outside it when the car was held up by the military patrol. There was a young lieutenant in charge whom I kept persistently addressing as 'Captain' as I explained to him that we were on our way back from a fair. He was indeed most courteous and apologised for having to search and interrogate us. He searched me first and then examined the driver's permit. Then he turned to the back of the car where Jimmy Stapleton was sitting with his arms around the girl. This sight seemed to convince him that we were a harmless lot as he said: "It's all right, you can go ahead". We had not gone far when Jerry Ryan put his hand into one of his waist-coat pockets and pulled out six rounds of .45 ammunition which he had forgotten all about.

*Anfield*  
Dropping the others at Anfield, where Ryan also left the ammunition, he and I continued the journey to Thurles. At the Ragg another party of military stopped us and there were no half measures about their searches. Ryan was made take off his boots, but we had nothing of an incriminating nature in our possession and were allowed to proceed.

On the following Monday, 16.8.1920, Jerry Ryan could not come with us to Templemore as he had to attend a meeting of the County Council. In his place we brought John Fahy, an officer in the Uppercurch Company. We were in the town at 11.30 a.m. and after waiting for three or four hours around Kelly's in the Crescent, Stapleton left us to go across the street to Fogarty's pub with a friend he had met. There were a couple of local Volunteers moving about the town watching for Wilson. One of these Volunteers came to me with the news that Wilson was coming down the street from his own home and that he was unaccompanied. On hearing this I sent word to Stapleton over in Fogarty's that the D.I. was walking along that side of the street.

As Wilson passed the door of Fogarty's, Stapleton stepped into the street behind him and shot him through the nape of the neck. That was the only shot fired and it was plain to me that Wilson was dead before he hit the ground.

I ordered the attacking party to leave the town at once. We got out through an exit at the side of Fogarty's, on through the Camden Estate and along the Dunkerron road for about 300 yards. We then turned into a byroad leading to Killea. At this stage Stapleton collapsed and we had to carry him a couple of miles until we reached his cousin's place, Tracey's in Killea. This was a fatiguing job as he was a big man, over 15 stone weight.

Stapleton recovered in Tracey's and was able to join us at a meal there. After a rest we went on to Mount Kinnane and slept there for the night. Next day, a young priest, Father Quinlan, led us across the Nenagh-Borrisoleigh road and directed us on the way to Uppercurch, which we reached that evening.

In Uppercurch we learned for the first time of the happenings in Templemore district after the shooting of D.I. Wilson. The police and military wrecked the town. The Town Hall and a number of shops and houses, including Kelly's, The Crescent, were burned. The creameries in Castleiney, Killeen and Loughmore, were all destroyed by Crown forces.

While burning the Town Hall a British officer and a private soldier were consumed in the flames. The officer, Lieut.-Colonel Beattie, was a Dublin man, and his father was a member of the Dublin Corporation. Acting on the erroneous information that Lieut-Colonel Beattie had lost his life while attempting to prevent the Town Hall from being destroyed, the Corporation, then controlled by the Sinn Fein Party including Dick Mulcahy, then Chief of Staff of the I.R.A., passed a resolution <sup>of sympathy</sup> with the dead officer's father. The action of the Dublin Corporation left us dumbfounded in Mid-Tipperary and was strongly condemned by all of us in the I.R.A. who knew the facts. I sent a strongly worded protest to the Chief of Staff blaming him particularly for having made no attempt to find out the facts before agreeing to the resolution of sympathy. Though I heard no more about the matter, I always had the feeling afterwards that Mulcahy did not like me, although up to that date we were very friendly.

Though I have tried to describe events in this story in their strict chronological order, I find I have slipped over a number of incidents that I am anxious should not be omitted.

On 7.6.1920, our brigade lost a very good Volunteer when Tommy Brett, an officer in the Drumbane company, on that date received a wound that resulted in his death in a Dublin hospital a few days later. About 2 o'clock on 7.6.1920, which was a Sunday, Brett and three or four of the men of his company

were standing about the village street in Drumbane when they saw a British military officer from Nenagh arrive on a motor-bike outside the R.I.C. post. Coming to the conclusion that this man had brought a dispatch to the police and that he would be returning by the same route in a short while, they decided to hold him up a couple of hundred yards outside the village. Brett had a revolver and he was the only armed member of the party who waited on the roadside for the officer to show up. The latter on his motor bike came along after half an hour. He was called on to halt but, instead, drew his revolver and fired, shooting Brett through the chest. The officer did not stop and got back safely to Nenagh.

The wounded man was brought by motor car to the Mater Hospital, but he did not respond to treatment and was dead in two or three days. His body was brought home by train to Thurles. We had planned to give him a military funeral and I went into Thurles that night to complete arrangements. I was sitting upstairs in Dwyer's publichouse in the Main St, when twelve police raided the place. I escaped through a skylight on to the roof where I remained until I got word that the raiders had gone. I went back again to the room I had left but I was there only a short while when the police made another raid. I escaped by the same exit and made up my mind to get away from Dwyer's altogether. The roof of that house was about five feet higher than Molloy's next door. As I got to the edge of Dwyer's roof I slipped and, in falling, went right through the glass roof of Molloy's on to the floor of the shop. The drop was nearly 30 feet and I was badly shaken. To make matters worse, the glass roof badly gashed both of my legs causing me to bleed profusely. Fortunately, someone heard the crash and Dr. Barry was brought to me. He inserted nine stitches in my legs and ordered me to bed to rest.

Next day, I took charge of the parade from the railway station and headed it until I got outside the town. I was not able to walk any further and got a lift on the hearse as far as the graveyard in Drumbane where there was a force of military in occupation. I gave instructions that any man who was likely to be arrested should not enter the graveyard and there was no firing party at the graveside. That night, at 12 o'clock, a firing party discharged three volleys over the grave. I had to stay in bed for three or four days afterwards.

On 2.7.1920, after midnight, I and three or four Volunteers fired a number of rifle shots at Holycross R.I.C. barracks. The garrison, by sending up Verey lights, attracted reinforcements who came in lorries from Thurles. At Holycross Abbey these troops saw a man named Richard Lumley on whom they opened fire and shot him dead. He was a harmless old man and was on his way home from a wake in Stakelum's in the village of Holycross. I attended the inquest next day when the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the R.I.C. and military who were involved in the shooting.

On 9.7.1920 a very strong force of I.R.A. under Ernie O'Malley attacked Rearcross barracks which was in the area of the North Tipperary Brigade. With my approval, 20 men from the 3rd Battalion, Mid Tipperary Brigade, assisted in the engagement. Otherwise I had no part in the operation. The building was destroyed but not captured.

Three weeks later the creamery in Uppercurch and a cottage there were burned by Crown forces as a reprisal for the attack on Rearcross barracks.

On 30.7.1920, a party of 12 men from 3rd Battalion which included the battalion commandant, Paddy Kinnane, Con, Micky and Tom Gleeson, Jack Foley, Dinny Mahoney, Mick Ryan, the two

Whelan brothers and Paddy Boyle, the local postman who acted as a scout, attacked a foot patrol which was going from Shevry to Upperchurch. These two places are about a mile and a half apart and the encounter took place roughly midway. The I.R.A. party were led by Jimmy Stapleton, while Sergeant Igoe was in charge of the police. He and the three constables with him were armed with rifles. The attack took place about 3 p.m. and in the first volley two of the police were fatally wounded and their rifles and about 100 rounds of ammunition were captured. Igoe and the other constable escaped and got safely back to their station.

Sergeant Igoe had only been transferred from Littleton a day or two before. While stationed there he was regarded as an inoffensive man whose only interest appeared to be a boxom barmaid in one of the local pubs. He was transferred from Shevry to Thurles about a week after the attack and his name will figure very much later on in this story.

Incidentally, he afterwards became the head of the 'Murder Gang' based in Dublin Castle.

The orgy of destruction and wild behaviour on the part of the Crown forces around Templemore following the shooting of D.I. Wilson intensified the feeling of terror among the civilian population in the district faced by these armed hooligans. This state of hypertension among the people was quickly to be relieved by a period of sensational events. I think it was on the night after the Town Hall was burned that a young man named Jimmy Walsh startled the town with a story that an apparition of Our Blessed Lady appeared to him at a place called Curraheen, two miles outside the town where a well was said to have suddenly sprung up on the spot on which the vision had manifested itself. Simultaneously,

statues of the Sacred Heart in the house of a family called Dwan in the Main St., which Walsh had kissed, started to 'bleed'. The people in the locality at once began to flock in hundreds to the scenes of these unusual happenings which in a matter of a day or two became headlines in the daily newspapers, not alone of this country, but throughout the whole world. "Miracles" of all kinds were reported and pilgrims started to pour into Templemore from all over Ireland and ultimately from across the water and even America.

Strange to say, the enemy troops who had been so aggressive and active in the area suddenly changed their attitude, becoming most inoffensive, and in a number of individual cases paid homage at the newly created places of worship. The huge number of motor cars, charabancs, sidecars traps and bikes, apart from the large number of excursionists who came by trains, caused a big traffic problem which my brigade, assisted by No. 1 Tipperary Brigade, decided to handle. As brigade commandant, I personally supervised this work inside in the town of Templemore for a number of weeks. The R.I.C. looked on while we were so engaged and did not show any resentment at our usurpation of their functions.

Of course, most of the pilgrims were most anxious to meet and talk to Mr. Walsh, the man responsible for all the excitement. Donations were poured upon him. Every movement, action and statement of his were carefully noted. Myself and some of the leading officers of the brigade sought and got a private interview with him in Dwan's house on the Saturday night after the first reports of the "apparition". Frankly, we looked upon the whole business with incredulity and the interview only added to that feeling. Walsh stated to us, among other things, that as a result of questions put by him to the "apparition" the Blessed Lady indicated her approval of the guerilla tactics

including the shooting of the Black and Tans and R.I.C. and wished to see the campaign intensified. Only for having warned my colleagues about their behaviour at the interview, not a man of us could have kept a straight face on hearing such remarks. I, however, seized upon the occasion to collect from Walsh some of the spoils which he was collecting from the pilgrims. On informing him that we badly needed funds to continue the campaign against the British, especially to buy arms and equipment, he readily handed over to me a sum of money which he had in his possession. It amounted to £75 and I went to Thurles that night and delivered the whole amount to the brigade quartermaster.

In the ensuing weeks the events in Templemore began to cause me a lot of worry. I was satisfied that there was nothing genuine about the business and that Walsh was either mentally abnormal or a hypocrite and, as a Catholic, I did not believe that it should be allowed to continue. While most of the older clergy in the county treated the whole affair with a lot of caution, some of the younger priests appeared to look upon Curraheen as another Lourdes and Walsh as a saint. Two developments, however, made me take definite action with the desired result.

The pilgrims coming to Templemore, anxious to make sure of getting into Dwan's house, where the bleeding statues were on view, and to the well in Curraheen, began to tip lavishly the I.R.A. men who were dealing with traffic and the crowds, with the result that a lot of these men, hitherto abstemious and enthusiastic Volunteers, took to drink and began to forget that we were engaged in a life and death struggle for the country's freedom. Discipline became very lax in the companies in and around Templemore and a number of incidents occurred which brought no credit to the republican cause.

In the other end of the brigade area, due to the foolish behaviour of the Dean of Cashel, a situation had arisen which, if unchecked, might have led to the town of Cashel becoming another Templemore. During the course of a visit by the "apparitionist", Mr. Walsh, to the presbytery in Cashel, he kissed a statue in that house which forthwith began to "bleed". The Dean, apparently convinced that something supernatural had occurred, told about it outside and crowds of people started to call at the presbytery to see the statue. For a number of days the Dean stood at the door of his home with the statue in his arms to give the sightseers an opportunity of witnessing it.

These new developments caused me to seek an interview with Canon M.K. Ryan of Thurles so that I could place before him the views of myself and of my brigade staff concerning the whole matter. My reception was by no means smooth and the Canon acted as if he was not very much impressed by what I had said. There were results, however, and at once, so far as Cashel was concerned, because the Dean was sent on a few weeks holidays, while from the pulpits in the Archdiocese of Cashel the congregation soon were advised to be careful in placing faith in the genuineness of the Templemore incidents - the apparition and the bleeding statues.

I think I might add that the Templemore happenings provided a windfall for the funds of our brigade. Collection boxes on behalf of the I.R.A. and Cumann na mBan brought in a total of £1500 in contributions from the pilgrims, all of which money was delivered to the brigade quartermaster.

About the end of September 1920, I got information about a small patrol which was cycling between Barnane and Borrifoleigh R.I.C. posts which I decided to attack. I entrusted the operation to the control of Jim Stapleton who, with the

assistance of Paddy Kinnane and about a dozen members of the Borrisoleigh Company with the captain, Tommy Kirwan, took up a position about half a mile from Barnane and behind the fence on the right hand side of the road. The patrol consisting of three men came along about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and a mixed volley of rifle and shotgun fire from the ambushing party quickly finished the attack. Two policemen - Constables Noone and Flood - were killed and the other man was wounded. Their three rifles and a couple of hundred rounds of ammunition were captured.

Jerry Ryan and myself armed with two rifles just arrived in a motor car driven by William (Sunny) McGrath, Thurles, when the ambush was over.

Military reinforcements arrived in the Borrisoleigh district in the course of some hours after the ambush and, while no houses were burned as reprisals, the troops and local police created a reign of terror in the area by indulging in indiscriminate firing into houses and across fields. These troops visited the well at Curraheen where they removed some crutches, scapulars and such mementoes left behind by pilgrims. They did the same in Dwan's in Templemore and then some of them, decorating themselves with the religious emblems, while others, feigning lameness, began using the crutches, paraded around the streets in mockery of the 'miracles' which were alleged to have recently taken place in the locality.

Some pilgrims travelling in motor cars towards Templemore were held up at Barnane and were made to complete their journey with the dead bodies of the two policemen thrown across their knees in the cars.

Expecting reprisals in Borrisoleigh on the night after the Barnane ambush, I mobilised a detachment of about 30 men,

mostly from the local company, to attack any incendiaries who might attempt destruction in the village. The night passed off peacefully and we dispersed at dawn. That ambush and the sequel to it practically put an end to the pilgrimage to Templemore and, incidentally, removed a great source of worry to myself and the brigade officers. Through the country it soon became common knowledge that there was something spurious about the whole business and the people ceased to have any faith in it.

Among the persons who came to Templemore as a pilgrim was the Australian Archbishop, Dr. Clune. He had come over to Ireland to see for himself what conditions were like. I met him in the town a couple of times and discussed the national situation with him. He was particularly interested in the attitude of the I.R.A. towards the R.I.C. In accordance with orders from G.H.Q., the ban against any kind of association with the police was being enforced very rigidly at the time and Dr. Clune asked me what alternative we had to offer to the men whom we were asking to resign from the R.I.C. I told him we were offering nothing; that we merely stated that their present position was wrong and that as Irishmen it was their duty to leave the force.

The Archbishop did not seem to think that there was much hope of our appeal being successful until the men who resigned were compensated, in some way, especially by alternative employment. He said that if any of them agreed to come to Australia he would guarantee to find them suitable work.

I wrote a dispatch to Michael Collins informing him very fully about my conversations with Dr. Clune and suggested that he should call to see the Archbishop at the Gresham Hotel where the latter was staying in Dublin. Collins did get in touch with

him, but as I never discussed the position after with Collins I can't say if my dispatch was the cause of their meeting.

In the first week in September 1920, I got word about an R.I.C. patrol consisting of a sergeant and five men which came on foot from Ballingarry to The Commons. This is rather hilly country along the Tipperary-Kilkenny border and there was no good position for an ambush along the route travelled by the patrol which went in pairs about 20 yards apart. Bringing with me Jimmy Stapleton, Con Gleeson, Jerry, Mick and Mick Ryan (Dan) I made an inspection of the itinerary used by the patrol and selected a position on the left hand side of the road, going from Ballingarry, behind a number of low banks. My little force was augmented by about eight men of the local company and Mick Bartley of Gortnahoe. We were all armed with rifles and we had to be spread out for a distance of about 70 yards in view of the extended order of the patrol. Myself and Jimmy Stapleton, both good shots, were at The Commons end and Jerry Ryan with a couple of men was in control at the Ballingarry end.

At about 2.30 on 8.9.1920, the patrol appeared, headed by the sergeant and a constable. The local Volunteers had a high regard for the sergeant who, they told me, was a very decent man and appealed to us not to fire at him. We let himself and his comrades pass and waited for the next pair. One of these two policemen was reading a newspaper and when they were within 15 yards Stapleton and myself fired. I aimed at the man with the newspaper and Stapleton took the other fellow. The bullet went right through the middle of the newspaper and that policeman fell on the road. Stapleton missed his target altogether as the second policeman jumped off the road and ran off across country. He got away safely.

Something also went wrong at Jerry Ryan's end. He was to deal with the last two men on the patrol. When they heard the shots fired by Stapleton and myself, they bounded off the road into the fields and also got away. About that moment a motor car full of children came along from the Ballingarry direction. It flashed past Ryan and drove on until it was held up by the sergeant who, with the constable who accompanied him, jumped on the footboard and began to fire at us, ordering the driver to move off at the same time.

The policeman who had fallen on the road remained lying there after his comrades had fled. We went out to have a look at him and, to my amazement, he was unhurt. The bullet which pierced the newspaper went right across his tunic at the chest without touching his body. He appealed for mercy and said that if given a chance he would leave the police force. He was as good as his word and resigned a week afterwards. His rifle and ammunition was taken by us, the only spoils from the engagement.

Commencing about the beginning of October 1920, the Thurles police opened a campaign of violence and terror unequalled by anything that we had previously experienced. I have always given credit for this to Sergeant Igoe, whom I have already mentioned on a preceding page. The police, masked and disguised, went around the town and district at night to the houses of people whom they knew to be connected with the I.R.A. and, where the person they wanted was at home, they shot him out of hand. On the night of 1st October several houses were raided by this murder gang, one of the first being Jimmy Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy, who was Town Clerk and also the I.R.B. Centre for the area, was not available. Later the same night, the brigade signals officer, Michael Cleary, was taken from his home in Drish, outside Thurles,

and after a number of bullets were poured into him, he was left for dead. He recovered, however.

It could be proved definitely that Sergeant Igoe was present when Jimmy Kennedy's was visited. When dealing with this police officer already I omitted to mention that, later on, after he had been transferred to Dublin Castle, I sent two men from my brigade to Dublin, at the request of Michael Collins, to identify him for "The Squad" in that city. These two men, Denis Heaney, Thurles, and Jimmy Ryan (Patsy), Drumbane, did their job all right, but Igoe survived the struggle.

On 18.10.1920, I went into Thurles to see the brigade adjutant on some urgent business. I was going along the Main St. with two girls, one of whom is now my wife, and her sister. I was held up by two policemen who asked me my name which I gave as O'Callaghan. I was unarmed and the police were about to take me to the barracks when a group of Volunteers who saw the incident came towards us. The police quickly took their departure. Next day, I was going up the Main street in that town with Jerry Ryan. At the corner leading to Westgate we noticed an R.I.C. man named Crawford, whom we decided to shoot. Seeing us pulling the guns when he was about 20 yards away, he quickly turned on his heels and ran off towards the barracks.

The Thurles police "Murder Gang" visited the Upperchurch district on the night of 24.10.1920, when they shot Michael Ryan and William Gleeson. Ryan was a 1st Lieutenant in the Upperchurch Company and Registrar of the Arbitration Court. He was very ill at the time and the police found him in bed at his home in Curraduff where they shot him. Gleeson was also found at home in Moher. He was brought outside and shot on the road convenient to his own house. He, too, was a Volunteer. That night, the same party of police visited the home of Jimmy

Stapleton in Finnahy. Stapleton heard them surrounding the place and waited for them with two guns in his hands at the top of a ladder which led from the kitchen to the loft where he was sleeping. One of the raiders actually had put his foot on the first rung of the ladder to ascend it when he changed his mind and turned back. After that they departed.

After leaving Gleeson's, the R.I.C. raiding party called at the home of the battalion commandant, Paddy Kinnane, Finnahy. He was absent, but his brothers, Jimmy and Jerome, both active Volunteers, were caught in bed. They were taken in their night attire into the yard and ordered to go on their knees. Realising the fate that awaited them, Jimmy whispered to Jerome to make a run for it, and instantaneously they both jumped to their feet and dashed off in the darkness. Jimmy got clear away but Jerome was shot through the lung. He got into a potato garden, where he hid among the stalks until the raiders departed. It was some hours later before he was found, and after being treated by Dr. Power, Borrisoleigh, he was removed to Thurles Hospital where he recovered.

I think it was in the last week of October that Sergeant Hurley, the friendly policeman referred to earlier on, gave me a list containing twelve names of prominent people who had been marked down for shooting by the Thurles R.I.C. "Murder Gang" if there were any more of the Crown forces shot in the Thurles district. My own name headed this list and, either second or third was Dr. Harty, Archbishop of Cashel, whose palace in Thurles adjoined the College grounds. In the first three was Joe McLoughney, a draper and a staunch republican. I don't recall the names of the others.

On receiving this list I made a secret visit to Canon M.K. Ryan, P.P., Thurles, and informed him of the dangerous position of the Archbishop. Dr. Harty was never prominently identified with the movement for Irish Independence and was always very guarded in any public pronouncements made by him in connection with the struggle. I, therefore, assumed that he had no idea that he was marked down for the vengeance of the "Murder Gang" and told all this to Canon Ryan. The Canon became very upset on hearing what I had to say. He tried to obtain an assurance from me that nothing would occur around Thurles which might harm the Archbishop, but I firmly assured him that considerations of that kind would not cause any lessening in the activities of the men under my command in Thurles or elsewhere. The poor man was in a very dejected and displeased mood when I left him.

The 1st Battalion brought off a nice coup on 31.10.1920 by capturing Littleton R.I.C. barracks with all its arms and equipment. I can give no accurate details of the material so seized. The operation turned out to be a relatively simple one, due to the fact that one of the garrison, a Black and Tan, was bribed by the battalion commandant, Jerry Ryan, to collaborate from inside, and he co-operated in the formulation of the plans to capture the building.

Ryan selected about 30 men armed with revolvers who assembled that morning in O'Keeffe's publichouse directly across the street from the barracks. Between 1 and 2 p.m. in the afternoon, at a given signal from the Black and Tan collaborator, the I.R.A. party rushed across the street, through the open door of the barracks

and had secured control of the place before the other policemen inside knew what was happening. After securing the arms, the raiding party burned the building to the ground.

The reaction to the capture of Littleton Barracks by the British forces was instantaneous and vicious. Parties of police and military raided the countryside, paying particular attention to Littleton where they burned the creamery and looted and burned shops and houses, including the home of Jerry Ryan. On that night Crown forces broke the windows in the offices of the "Tipperary Star"; a newspaper which frequently criticized their behaviour, and the windows in Joe McLoughney's drapery shop in Thurles.

On 28th February, 1921, one of the Thurles Companies was drilling at Loughtagalla on the outskirts of the town, about 60 men. They were warned of the approach of a number of lorries of police. One of the scouts, while running to notify the men, was seen and fired at. He kept on in his efforts and was shot dead. He was a young Volunteer named Thomas Kelly who lived in Mitchel St.

Bearing in mind the list of persons that Sergeant Hurley had given me about a week before, it occurred to me that the "Murder Gang" might raid the Archbishop's palace on the night of the capture of Littleton Barracks, and, to intercept them, I took a party of about 15 men into the college grounds at

10 p.m. As nothing had happened up till 2 a.m. I then withdrew. The party broke up into groups of three or four men and went up the Main St. to "Mixey" O'Connell's. He was with us himself and admitted us through a side gate into the rear of his shop. Just as we were about to go in through O'Connell's back door we heard the breaking of glass on the street and rushed out to find that the windows of Joe McLoughney's drapery shop had been smashed. This had been done by two R.I.C. men who had flung bombs through the windows. They had cleared off as soon as they heard us coming, but had been seen by one of the Volunteers who had left us at O'Connell's gateway to go home. We all went back to O'Connell's where a few of the boys had a couple of drinks. Though it was not noticed until next day, a bomb had also been flung through the fanlight over the door opening into O'Connell's bar. None of the bombs used by the vandals exploded. I think we went to bed in a store at the back of O'Connell's premises.

Expecting more trouble the next night, we assembled 30 men armed with rifles and revolvers. I took about 15 men into the college grounds again and Jerry Ryan was in charge of the remainder in position in the Mall. Probably more than a couple of hours had elapsed when a scout who was keeping an eye-out around the town came to me with news that windows were being broken, but he was unable to locate the exact place where it was occurring. I made up my mind to investigate and, leaving about seven men near the cathedral, I led the rest across the bridge for about 20 yards into the Main St. where I got them extended across, each man lying prone at the firing position. At the same time, I sent Michael Egan, vice-Commandant, 2nd Battalion, with word to Jerry Ryan that the enemy were about the town. Egan was carrying a revolver.

As we waited we heard some commotion in the distance and

I advanced cautiously on tip-toes to try to discover what was causing it. I had gone about 50 yards when I heard my own men calling: "They're coming". I doubled back and ordered the party to follow me back to the bridge. It was not too dark at the time and as I crossed the parapet of the bridge I noticed what seemed to be a group congregated in the Mall about 20 yards away. Suspecting they were policemen, I ordered three or four men next to me to fire into them with rifles. We fired only two shots each when the group scattered and ran away up along the Mall. One figure, however, came towards us and he turned out to be Michael Egan, whom I had sent with the message to Jerry Ryan. While on his way, Egan walked right into a party of police concealed at the entrance to a side street. Except that he was deprived of his revolver, this lucky man was not otherwise the worse of his experience. He was being questioned by his captors as we opened fire.

In their retreat the police ran right past the positions occupied by Jerry Ryan's party. For some inexplicable reason, he ordered his men to withhold their fire, which they did. The police made no effort to come back but, instead, continued to run out from the Mall over the railway line and across the fields to their barracks. They must have got a bad fright since, in their flight, they dropped dozens of hand grenades which were being picked up for days afterwards. Two of them who were wounded were conveyed next morning to the military hospital in Tipperary town.

Coming towards the end of October 1920, an attack, for which elaborate preparations had been made by the 3rd Battalion was cancelled by me at the last moment. This was to be an attempt to capture and destroy Shevry Barracks which was held by about 15 policemen. Details of the layout of the barracks had been supplied to Jim Stapleton by a local postman, Paddy Boyle, who pretended friendship with the police while, in reality, he was an intelligence officer of ours. Boyle

delivered letters to the police and used visit the barracks.

Stapleton, who was in charge of all the arrangements, had picked about .... of the best men in the battalion for the attack. Aproximately 25 of them were armed - most with rifles and some with shotguns. The remaining 15 men he intended to use for the conveyance of bottles of petrol and paraffin oil from the church grounds where this material was to be stored, to the barrack grounds. The fences around the barracks had been levelled to the ground except on the side facing the Thurles road.

The sole hope of this operation being a success lay in burning the building and forcing the garrison to come out and surrender. Stapleton proposed to attempt to set the building alight by bursting a hole in the roof of a one-storeyed linney which protruded from the back of the barrack parallel to and about 15 yards from the road fence. There was a water tank at the corner of the linney and the main wall which could be availed of to break the roof as a couple of men standing on top of the tank could get well up along the linney roof which they could break with hammers and then pour petrol and paraffin into the interior followed by bombs.

The attacking force mobilised at Upperchurch at about 5.30 p.m. I joined it and watched rehearsal exercises in that village. During these exercises the party met with its first mishap - a spraying machine, which it was intended to use for distributing the petrol inside the linney of the barracks, got clogged and could not be got to work again. We moved off from Upperchurch after 9 o'clock that night and reached Shevry about 10 o'clock.

Before starting operations, I went on a reconnaissance of the barrack grounds with Stapleton, as I was anxious to

see for myself how the plans would be likely to work out.

I at once saw a serious defect in them. The ground between the road fence and the water tank was overlooked by a big loophole cut in the main wall of the building. While it was quite possible to sneak over this stretch of ground before the assault began, there was little hope that it could be used once the loophole was manned, as men attempting to cross it would be under rifle fire and grenade splinters. Any hope there was of making the operation go according to plan depended on this stretch of ground being freely available to the men carrying the supplies of petrol and paraffin. Since this was not the case, I could not conscientiously agree to men being exposed to such a big risk and ordered the abandonment of the attack.

Eight or ten days afterwards, we prepared for another operation in the same locality which also turned out to be abortive. A single lorry was still bringing rations and other supplies from Thurles to the Shevry police. About 9.11.20, an ambush was prepared at Ballyboy, outside Upperchurch, to attack this lorry which usually was carrying a mixed force of police and soldiers numbering between ten and twelve. A horse-cart was placed across the road to act as a barricade and the attacking party, about 15, were mostly belonging to the Upperchurch company. I was in charge myself.

At about 4 o'clock in the evening, just as the lorry was approaching the barricade, one of my men accidentally discharged a shot. This alerted the driver, a highly competent one, too, who was known to us as "Jock". On hearing the shot, he accelerated the vehicle which crashed its way through the cart and then drove off at top speed. Though we fired several shots the enemy had no casualties. This incident was reported in the newspapers as having taken place at Roskeen, but the site of the ambush position was in the townland of Ballyboy.

In the latter end of November 1920, the capture of Kilcommon barracks was planned by Ernie O'Malley, G.H.Q. officer. Kilcommon was in the North Tipperary Brigade area, but O'Malley's plans involved five brigades in the operation. The North Tipperary Brigade was to hold the roads leading to Kilcommon on the Monagh-Limerick side against enemy reinforcements; the Mid-Tipperary Brigade was to hold the Templemore-Thurles road; South Tipperary Brigade were to hold the enemy coming from Tipperary Town, while East and Mid Limerick Brigades were to defend the roads leading up from Limerick city and county to the south. For the actual attack itself only men experienced in previous engagements were to be used. It was generally considered that this operation might lead to several days' fighting and we were all buoyed up in expectation of being involved in the biggest fight of the Black and Tan war.

Everything was ready and the attacking party was assembled when it was announced that the attack had been called off. Word had reached O'Malley and the officers whom he had selected to assist him in the engagement that in the house adjoining the barracks an old lady of nearly 90 years was lying seriously ill. It was intended that the attacking party should seize possession of her home and bore from there into the barracks. The old lady was the mother of "Pakey" Ryan of Doon, who was prominent in the republican movement.

I estimate that there must have been well over 1000 members of the I.R.A. mobilised for the attack. George Plunkett from Dublin arrived in Uppercurch just as I was about to move out of there to my own position. He wanted to come with us, but as he looked very exhausted, I succeeded in persuading him to go to bed, pointing out that he would be in plenty of time next morning as we expected the fighting to

last a couple of days. Next day when I met him and told him what had happened, he was astounded. He could not understand why so big a project had been allowed to fall through just because an old woman was ill. "She could have been shifted", he said, "and in any event she had not very long more to live".

On 1.12.1920, a party of masked R.I.C. travelling in two motor cars and believed to be under the control of Sergeant Igoe, raided Meagher's in Annefield about 10 o'clock. The only man in the house at the time was the head of the household, Ned Meagher, then about 60 years of age. The intruders searched the house, drinking some whiskey which they found in a jar in a room. One of the girls, Kathleen Meagher, pulled a mask off the face of one of them, but she could not recognise him. The raiders took Ned Meagher out into the farmyard where they ordered him to go on his knees and say his prayers. He declined to do so, saying "I'm not afraid to meet my God". At that very moment somebody down at the road whistled loudly. The police, taking the whistle as evidence of a contemplated attack by the I.R.A., made for the motor cars and drove away.

On the return journey, the police party entered the home of Michael Leahy, Mallaunbrack, where they found a card party in progress, which included Thomas O'Loughlin, Killinan. Leahy and O'Loughlin, both Volunteers, were brought outside and fired at. O'Loughlin died in a few hours, but Leahy, though badly wounded, recovered.

After the raid in Meagher's, Annefield, the old couple left the house altogether and went to live with Mrs. Meagher's sister. All the sons were 'on the run', and the only person left to look after the place was the eldest daughter, Mary. She left the house at night but returned during the day time to milk and feed cows and look after pigs and poultry. Within a week subsequent to the police raid, a party of Auxiliaries

from Templemore arrived in a tender. They seized a pig and all the poultry they could lay their hands on. Two or three of them then grabbed Mary Meagher and threw her into the tender which was then driven off. About half a mile down the road there was a sharp bend and on the fence on one side was a hedge. The Auxiliaries ordered Miss Meagher to have the hedge cut on their return and then she was flung from the lorry into a dyke on the side of the road. She ignored the order and went back to her home.

A few days before Christmas 1920, a big enemy convoy was attacked by about a dozen men at Collaun, about two miles from Borrisoleigh on the road to Nenagh. The I.R.A. party, all from the 3rd Battalion, was led by Jimmy Stapleton and were equipped with rifles. The convoy consisted of 15 lorries carrying approximately 150 men.

The attacking force held positions along the ridge of a long defile about 300 yards from the road over which they had such complete control that they kept the convoy pinned down from about 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Owing to their lack of numbers the attackers could not take further aggressive action and, with their ammunition running short and the possibility of being taken in the rear by enemy reinforcements, they withdrew shortly after 3 o'clock. They had no losses and I can't say if the enemy had any or not.

That engagement at Collaun was the first of a number of others at the same place. Ultimately the enemy ceased using that road altogether.

Following decisions taken at a Brigade Council meeting held early in the New Year (1921), units of the brigade were in a number of actions on the night of 14th January, namely at Shevry, Roskeen and Holycross. In the two first-mentioned places the operations were under the command of Jimmy Stapleton, who arranged for the sniping of the police stations for

several hours, drawing heavy return fire and lots of bomb throwing from the garrisons.

In the case of Holycross the police barracks was sniped from about 11 to 11.30 p.m. in the hope that the police there might be induced to send out a patrol which it was planned would be at Galbertstown,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the barracks. I was in charge here myself. About half a mile from our main position we had hung a strand of strong cable diagonally across the road in the hope that if a lorry came along it would be diverted by the cable to the right hand side, where we had the wall removed, and over the side into a field which was about 20 feet below the level of the road. I had posted five men with rifles behind a fence 60 or 70 yards from the road where the cable was hung and, on the same side as where we hoped the lorry would topple into the field. My idea in doing so was that in case a cycling force would come instead of a lorry, this party would open fire and by rearguard action try to lure the enemy to follow them into the position where I was waiting with about 25 men carrying rifles and shotguns.

After being there all night there was no sign of the enemy and, about daybreak, I dismissed the men. Eight or ten of these came from around Holycross. They were making their way home across the fields and were about to cross a wooden bridge at a point where another road from Thurles to Holycross skirts the river at this bridge when they almost collided with a party of soldiers who had come on bikes from Thurles. There was a quick exchange of shots as both parties retreated, but nobody was hit on either side.

On 14th January also, the first steel protected and wire covered military lorry, with which we afterwards became very familiar, appeared in our brigade area. It was travelling

along the Borrisoleigh-Nenagh road when it was attacked at Ross, two miles from Borrisoleigh, by five or six members of the Borrisoleigh Company armed with rifles under their captain, Tommy Kirwan. The troops, who dismounted, returned the fire which lasted for a couple of hours when our men withdrew. It was reported at the time that three soldiers were wounded.

Two important developments took place in the first fortnight of January 1921, the holding of a meeting with a view to the formation of the 1st and 2nd Southern Divisions and the starting of a flying column in the Mid-Tipperary Brigade. The meeting in question was at Glanworth, between Fermoy and Mallow in Co. Cork. As far as I remember, Seamus Robinson presided. Others whom I recall as having been present were Liam Lynch, then O/C. Cork No. Brigade; Sean Hegarty, O/C. Cork No. 1; Dick Barrett, Charlie Driscoll (both Corkmen); Donnchadh Hannigan, East Limerick; Con Maloney and Matt Barlow, South Tipperary Brigade. It was announced at the meeting that Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley had been selected by G.H.Q. to command the 1st and 2nd Southern Divisions, respectively, and it was also explained that, in future, the brigades for which Divisional Headquarters had been set up would have no direct contact with G.H.Q. A resolution passed at the meeting called upon G.H.Q. to issue an order requesting the two Limerick City battalions to distribute whatever arms and ammunition they held among the active brigades in Munster. It was wellknown to us that the Limerick City Volunteers held a good number of rifles and some .303 ammunition of which they had made very little use in the struggle up till then. A "pep" talk was given urging the less active units to intensify their operations against the British troops so as to bring relief to areas in the south, particularly part of Cork, where the enemy was applying heavy pressure. I do not think

that the Divisional staff really began to function for a good while after this meeting, but I cannot say definitely when they began to do so.

The formation of the Mid-Tipperary Brigade flying column was agreed to at a brigade council meeting held about the middle of January 1921. <sup>Michael Smeal</sup> Jerry Ryan, O/C. No. 1 Battalion, was appointed column leader and no other officers were selected. The column numbered about 30 strong; each man had a rifle and most of them also carried revolvers.

The column assembled for the first time at a vacant house in Forgestown, which became better known afterwards as "The Barracks". According to my own reckoning, this happened on 22.1.1921. I was present myself and remained with the men that night in "The Barracks" where we slept on beds of hay. We had information that police, using a tender, occasionally patrolled the road between Kilcooley and Killenaule and thought that this would be a good opportunity to try out the column in its first operation.

About 8 o'clock next morning we set out for Twomileborris having breakfast on the way at Coalfields. The site selected to attack the tender was near Gortnahoe which we could not reach until the following day; so, to avoid the risk of the police getting to hear of our intentions or to learn of our presence, we decided to wait till nightfall around Twomileborris. While there I got a dispatch from the brigade adjutant requesting me to meet him that night at Larry Hickey's in Thurles as he had some urgent communications to send to G.H.Q. which he wished me to see and sign. I went on to Thurles, armed with a revolver, while the column proceeded to Gortnahoe where they found billets.

The actual site chosen for the attack was in the townland

*Foynstown*

of Portstown. Here a trench was cut across the road and on the right hand side of the road coming from Gortnahoe, the column, now reinforced by seven or eight men from the Gortnahoe company, took up positions overlooking the road trench. Around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, instead of a police tender, soldiers in a private car and a lorry and numbering about 16 or 18 men came from the Gortnahoe direction. The two vehicles were about 50 yards apart and the private car, which was leading, crashed into the trench and was at once subjected to a heavy fusillade from the rifles of the column men and the shotguns of the local Volunteers. Most, if not all, the occupants of the private car were either killed or wounded. The lorry pulled up about 30 yards from the trench and the troops in it quickly dismounted and brought a machine gun into play on the attackers. Twenty minutes of interchanging shots went on when a second machine gun opened up. This was brought into use by another lorry of troops which had arrived on the scene, and had just come over the top of a hill 400 yards from the trench. On seeing the reinforcements, the column leader gave orders to his men to withdraw. The terrain which he had to use made retirement difficult as it was flat boggy country providing little cover. I inspected the place a few times afterwards and wondered indeed how our lads managed to extricate themselves without even having sustained a single casualty.

There is no doubt whatever that the enemy had heavy casualties in the Foynstown engagement. It was officially admitted that the losses were two killed and three wounded, but information given to us by some of the local police put the number killed as twelve.

Exactly one month after the ambush, five farmhouses in the vicinity were destroyed as a reprisal under the orders of

Colonel Cameron, officer commanding the British troops in the area and whose headquarters were then, I think, in Fethard.

My going off to meet the brigade adjutant very nearly led to my capture and death. I made my way into Larry Hickey's as arranged and was waiting upstairs for my colleague to put in an appearance, when a scout who was posted to watch out for enemy raiders shouted through the letter box of the door that a force of R.I.C. were searching "Mixey" O'Connell's house next door. I waited for a while, thinking that if they found nobody in O'Connell's, the police might move off. Word came after awhile that they had gone. Concluding that O'Connell's place might now be safer than Hickey's, I went out by the back door to get into O'Connell's back yard. The wall separating the two yards was about 8-feet high and I had my breast just on the top of it when I heard the order "Hands up": In the light which was shining on me I could see a figure sitting on top of the wall a few yards away from me; he was a guard whom they had left on the place. As I was leaving Hickey's the scout, again reporting through the letter box, shouted that the main raiding party was returning. Apparently the man by whom I was not confronted was left to keep an eye on developments at the back.

On being challenged I dropped back into Hickey's and, crouching as low as I could, I ran down under the shelter of the wall to the lower end of the yard. The guard was firing after me. From the corner into which I had crouched I had a clear view of my opponent. I drew my revolver and fired four shots at him. He quickly disappeared from view. Without delaying, I seized my chance and from the yard ran down the garden and out into the Mall. I went on to Barry's in Turtulla where I stayed for the night. On examining my overcoat, I found that it had been penetrated by shots several times during the brief encounter. Next day, I heard that the policeman involved was wounded by my return fire. Later the same day

I rejoined the flying column which was on its way to Castleiney, outside Templemore, to put up for the night.

At daybreak we started to march in the Gortrabeg direction and as the morning advanced, we narrowly missed being surprised by a strong military detachment on bikes going from Templemore to Templetuohy. However we were not seen by the troops who were actually in search of us at the time. On reaching Templetuohy they went on to Moynard where, at the castle, the column had halted for a rest on the previous morning. As this military force approached Moynard Castle, they advanced on it in skirmishing formation and it took them four hours to cover a stretch of half a mile and while they did so they kept up strong machine gun and rifle fire on the castle itself. Of course, they had all their trouble for nothing.

In the meantime, we were continuing our journey to Gortrabeg and, about a mile from that village, we met the local company captain of the Volunteers who was sent into the village to make a note of the movements of the R.I.C. stationed there. He returned after three or four hours reporting that he had seen no police moving about.

The column resumed its march and reached Killee where billets were found. In the morning we crossed the Devil's Bit Mountain into Glenguile where we again billeted. The following day we marched to Glastrigan and spent the night there. The local Volunteers brought news that extensive raids by military and police had taken place that day in Glenguile where we had put up the night before. Spending only one night in Glastrigan, we went on to Drumbane where we met Jim Stapleton, a man who was always anxious for a fight, but he had no suggestion to make as to where there was a suitable opportunity to encounter the enemy.

About this time, Jerry Ryan had left the flying column to take over a new post - organiser of Dail Courts in the Mid-Tipperary Constituency. His place was taken by Mick Small. Ryan was in Thurles attending to his new duties when he was arrested.

Small continued to move the column through the brigade area until towards the end of March when the Brigade Council decided to disband it temporarily. It had proved not quite suitable to the area. First of all, great difficulty was being experienced in maintaining such a large body of men and then, though several attempts were made to waylay enemy detachments, these all proved abortive except in the case of Poynstown. Subsequently, the brigade flying column never came together as such. Instead, in each of the three battalions a number of men were picked who could be quickly mobilised for any operation and this arrangement lasted until the Truce.

About February or March 1921, the Holycross Company, acting on information received, made a raid on Major McCalmont's home at Mount Juliet in Co. Kilkenny, commandeering two private motor cars for the purpose. The raid was under the control of John Ryan, captain of that company, and was carried out without my approval. However, it resulted in the capture of a nice little arsenal - one .45 Colt automatic, three .45 revolvers, some sporting rifles and shotguns, a big quantity of ammunition and a pair of powerful field glasses. Though I admonished the men responsible for going into another brigade area without my consent, I felt that the material seized should have been taken long before that by the Kilkenny men themselves and that when they failed to do so they did not deserve to have it returned to them.

On 22.2.21, Jimmy Stapleton, who was now vice-commandant of the Mid-Tipperary Brigade, had about ten men, all from the

3rd Battalion, on a quest for enemy convoys. They were having a meal during the afternoon in Ryan's of Rathcardon, a townland between Borrisoleigh and Templemore, when two tenders travelling from Borrisoleigh were heard coming in the distance. The troops in these vehicles were Auxiliaries returning to their base in Templemore and as they went along they were firing shots in all directions.

A defile traversed at the bottom by a river separated Ryan's house from the road by a distance of between 300 and 400 yards. On hearing the shooting, Stapleton rushed his men out and took up positions around the house. When the tenders came abreast of these positions on the main road, the I.R.A. party opened fire, which was quickly answered by the Auxiliaries for about five minutes. They then drove off without any attempt to approach the attacking party. The only casualties which resulted were one Auxiliary wounded and one pig killed in Ryan's yard.

In the last days of February 1921, one of the Thurles I.R.A. companies were drilling at Loughtagalla on the outskirts of the town when several lorries of police attempted to surround them. There were about 60 Volunteers on parade but they all managed to get away safely. One young Volunteer, Thomas Kelly, Mitchell St., who was running to warn his comrades of the approach of the lorries, was fired at by the police and shot dead.

Following that shooting incident, things became very lively around Thurles for a while. Two natives of the town and both ex-British soldiers - James <sup>Mac</sup> Neagher ("Rockam") and Patrick Meara ("Swordy") - had been under observation by the Volunteers. Both men were intimate pals and had been mixing a great deal with the R.I.C. and Black and Tans. They had

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**in place of each part abstracted**

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(ii) How many documents have been abstracted: 1p.

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MS 1454 Nitrostaedt June 1956  
Information of a planned nature p 67.

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(These will be the reasons given on the certificate under Section 8(4).)

Moloney

Name: (J. Moloney.)

Grade: Col.

Department/Office/Court:

Date: 7 March 2003.

been seen, too, hanging around country roads in the vicinity of houses where "wanted" men were fed and sheltered. A number of raids carried out in the town and district by the R.I.C. were attributed to information supplied by these two men. On the day of Jerry Ryan's arrest, they met him as he was leaving a house in the town and saw him enter another house nearby. They went away, but shortly afterwards a force of R.I.C. came along and halted a short distance from where Ryan was visiting. He was not aware of their presence as he emerged into the street and was held up and taken prisoner. He had nothing to incriminate him in his possession, but he was sent to an internment camp on Spike Island.

I cannot say now whether it was the arrest of Jerry Ryan or the shooting of Tommy Kelly that led the Battalion Council of the 1st Battalion to ask for permission to execute as spies <sup>Mac</sup>Meagher and O'Meara. I gave authority for their execution. It may have been on 1st March 1921, that the two of them, while sitting on Turtulla Bridge, were captured by Mick Small and members of the brigade column. They were taken across the fields to Ballytarsna where they were informed by Small that they were about to be shot as spies and if they wished to have spiritual attention it would be forthcoming. Meara did not answer, but <sup>Mac</sup>Meagher became very abusive. Both men were then told to go on their knees and say their prayers. Neither of them did so, and Small then ordered the firing party to proceed with the execution. From what I was told afterwards, Meara was silent as he faced the firing squad,

The usual notices were pinned to the bodies of both men announcing that they had been executed as spies by the I.R.A.

Reprisals for these executions took place on the night of

10th March 1921. Five masked and armed policemen raided the house of Larry Hickey, publican, Main St., Thurles, when they found the owner in bed. He was ordered out in his night attire and when he reached the head of the stairs he was tripped and thrown downstairs by an R.I.C. man named Jackson. In the fall, Hickey's neck was broken and he was in great pain at the foot of the stairs when Sergeant Enright, who was in charge of the raiders, shot him dead to put an end to his agony. Hickey was a wellknown republican in Thurles, and a detailed account of his shooting was given to me during the Truce period by Sergeant Enright himself.

While the raid in Hickey's was in progress, another party of masked policemen visited the home of the Loughnane family in Mitchell St., Thurles, and shot dead in bed William Loughnane. This man along with his father and three brothers were active members of the local I.R.A. company

On the same night, the Barry homestead in Turtulla, a short distance from Thurles, was entered by R.I.C. men in disguise. They were looking for Denis Regan, a workman and a prominent I.R.A. man. He had hidden in a couchette in the house and when the police could not find him, they ordered Michael Barry to come with them, as they were going to shoot him instead of Regan. Barry had no connection with the republican movement and Regan overheard remarks made by the raiders. Rather than see his employer suffer on his account Regan left his hiding place and gave himself up. Barry was then released while Regan was led into the yard where the police fired six or eight shots at him. Though very seriously wounded, he survived and is still hale and hearty. He was treated by his employer's brother, Dr. Barry, who was then in practice in Thurles and was always ready to answer a call

when needed by the I.R.A.

On 29.3.21, a party of three Volunteers, attempting to raid the office of the Petty Sessions Clerk in Thurles for the purpose of destroying Dog Licences and other Court records, were surprised by an R.I.C. patrol. The raid was not an official one and was made on the initiative of the three men involved, of whom I am able to remember only the names of two, Jack Harty, Holycross, and James McLoughney, Thurles. The patrol sent word of the interception to their own and the military barracks and in a short time Harty and his two companions, who had managed to get out of the town, were being pursued across fields by policemen on foot and several lorries of policemen and soldiers. McLoughney was shot dead after getting as far as Gormacstown, four miles from Thurles; the other two escaped.

During the months of March and April 1921, the R.I.C. stations in Dovea, Drombane, Holycross, Roskeen and Shevry were sniped repeatedly at nighttime by members of 1st and 3rd battalions. The value of this type of operation was shown when the enemy decided to evacuate the stations altogether towards the end of April. The police were no sooner withdrawn than the buildings were destroyed by the local I.R.A. companies. A new enemy post had been established at Castlefogarty earlier in the year where a detachment of soldiers were stationed and most of the R.I.C. who were taken out of Shevry, Roskeen and Drumbane were transferred to Castlefogarty. The building here was a big mansion situated well back in the fields amid wooded country. Heavy barbed wire entanglements were fixed up by the garrison among the trees for a good distance from the mansion. In the secluded location where it stood it was almost impossible to keep a track on the movements of the garrison about the grounds, especially after dusk. It was, therefore, a post which was difficult to approach and too risky to attempt

In April 1921, the brigade suffered the loss of its adjutant and engineer, Michael Kennedy and Denis Heaney, who were captured in Horse and Jockey by a force of R.I.C. The apprehension of the latter could not have been more timely from the enemy's point of view and why he was not shot on the spot is a thing I often wonder about. He was a university graduate and had qualified as an engineer at that time. He had made a special study of explosives and land mines and had been engaged for weeks prior to his arrest in the manufacture of mines which we hoped to use on the roads against enemy convoys.

It was then very difficult to get suitable explosives and material to make such mines, but after a great deal of trouble we had managed to get the necessary supplies. G.H.Q. had sent us a quantity of "war flour", electric detonators and cable. The casing - 6-inch steel piping - and 6-Volt batteries were obtained from hardware shops and garages in Thurles. A 'factory' had been set up in Forgestown. Heaney had actually made a few mines before he was caught and a number of positions were selected in the 1st Battalion area in which they were to be laid. There was then no other man available who possessed Heaney's knowledge of these contraptions or, for that matter, who was capable of properly laying or exploding a mine by means of an electric charge.

As well as being brigade engineer, Heaney was also acting brigade intelligence officer. Shortly before his arrest I had asked him to compile a list of loyalists to be shot by us as a reprisal for the shooting of any more of our supporters by the R.I.C. or military. This list was found in Heaney's possession when he was being searched after capture, and accompanying it was correspondence that made it very clear why the list had been prepared.

Among the police who were present at the time were some of the individuals who were known to have participated in the murder of republicans and into whose hands I would not care to have fallen at any time. Heaney's guardian angel must have been doing a bit of overtime when he was not shot there and then.

Not long after the capture of Heaney and Kennedy, we had a visit from the Director of Organisation, Eamon Price, who was accompanied by our new Divisional Commandant, Ernie O'Malley. They summoned a Brigade Council meeting which was held in Florrie Harrington's, Ballytarsna, Thurles, and I think it was at this meeting that Andy Donnelly and Mick Hynes were appointed as Brigade Engineer and Brigade Adjutant respectively. Price was on a tour of inspection in the south of Ireland. He interviewed all officers in the brigade from the rank of company captain upwards.

I do not recall any recommendations having been made by these two senior officers as regards changes or improvements in the administration of the affairs of the brigade, except that a regular brigade headquarters should be established and that a daily system of communication should be brought into existence between companies and the battalions and between the battalions and the brigade. In order to implement these two recommendations, we constructed a dugout in Forgestown which served as brigade headquarters until the Truce, and proceeded forthwith to put the daily system of communication into operation. This involved a certain amount of organisation and explanation to the company and battalion officers. Men in each company area were detailed to take the dispatches, bikes had to be provided, lines of communication re-examined and a timing system introduced to check against possible delays.

Perhaps I should have mentioned earlier that the principal

idea behind the daily dispatches was to have a full picture of the day-to-day happenings in each company area at battalion and brigade headquarters, at most only a day behind such happenings. The company captain was obliged to report on the movements of the police and military within his area, to give details of raids and searches, arrests, assaults, burnings, shootings and any other kind of activity in which enemy forces were involved. The report also had to contain particulars of the company's own activities, and wherethere was nothing to report, a "Nil" report had to be submitted. Candidly, I don't think the new system proved to be anything better than what was already in operation, when, in addition to the ordinary weekly reports on parades, drilling, arms strength, enemy movements, each company captain was required to ensure that an urgent dispatch was sent to his battalion headquarters when such matters as a suitable chance go attack enemy forces arose. In turn, the Battalion O/C. was expected to report at once to the brigade headquarters anything which he considered warranted the immediate attention of the officers there.

One definite effect which the daily system of dispatches had was to divert the attention of the brigade and battalion officers from military activities proper for a period because of the time which these officers had to devote to the introduction of the system.

When I met Ernie O'Malley at the Brigade Council meeting at Florry Harrington's place, I made the suggestion to him that I.R.A. forces should enter and take over possession of the town of Thurles for one night, at least. I was keen on this idea for reasons of prestige, apart from the fact that if the operation was well planned it might enable us to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. I told O'Malley that I would be able to put into action all the men in my brigade who had experience

of meeting the enemy under fire and for whom I had arms, but that I felt we should be reinforced by the South Tipperary Brigade flying column under Commandant Dinny Lacy. This was a well-equipped force over 30 strong, each man having a modern rifle. O'Malley, though he listened very carefully to what I had to say, never afterwards got in touch with me about it.

Another new idea which was introduced into the brigade during the Spring of 1921 was the heliograph for the transmission of messages. Joe Dwan, battalion engineer, 1st Battn. made a special study of this kind of apparatus and actually constructed four of them. He trained about eight men of the Boherlahan company and they became very proficient in their use. However, it took some time to achieve all this and the Truce came just when these heliographs could be of practical value to us.

About May 1921, the Thurles R.I.C. tried out a new deception in the hope of being able to inflict damaging losses on the I.R.A. Parties of police, attired in I.R.A. fashion and numbering about 20 men, went at night time on foot into the districts of Horse and Jockey, Littleton and Koycarkey. These parties were always led by the notorious Sgt. Egright, a North Kerryman and an ex-Canadian soldier. His accent did not require a great deal of changing to make it rather similar to that of the Tipperary people. A favourite dodge of his was to knock at a house owned by people of republican sympathies and pretend to the owner or his family that it was "Leahy and the boys" who were outside and that they were looking for some "wanted" I.R.A. men. These tricks never worked, as the civilian population was too wary to disclose anything they knew until they were very sure of those to whom they were speaking. After about four abortive attempts the police got wise to themselves and abandoned the idea entirely.

Sergeant Enright then figured in another form of activity. About once or twice a week he led about a dozen policemen on patrol from Thurles into the country, varying the itinerary each time. Mick Small made an effort to engage this patrol on the Mall road, half a mile from the town. With a force of 25 men he waited there for about five hours but without result, as the patrol did not come out.

In or about the same fortnight two more efforts made by Small to engage the police were also unsuccessful. Information had come to him that a detachment of R.I.C. were to travel by train from Thurles down to Limerick Junction. He selected Goold's Cross railway station as the site of the attack for which he had the same men as were with him at the Mall road in Thurles. Three or four trains passed, but there were no enemy forces travelling. He next tried to intercept police at Laffan's Bridge station and again he was disappointed.

Late in May 1921, Jack Scott, Commandant of the 2nd (Templemore) Battalion, with 15 or 20 men held up the Dublin train between Templemore and Lisduff and removed a quantity of Belfast goods which they burned on the spot. After this job was finished the I.R.A. were moving through the Castleiney district when they encountered a detachment of military. There was a brief exchange of shots and the engagement was broken off when the military resumed their journey.

In June 1921, the Auxiliaries, who had been stationed in The Abbey in Templemore, were withdrawn and sent to Cork. I had got news on the previous day that this was going to occur and I sent an order to Scott to burn the vacated building, an extensive mansion owned by Sir John Carden. The order was carried out the night the Auxiliaries left; a couple of companies of the 2nd Battalion participated.

On 28.6.21, the attack on Borrisoleigh R.I.C. Barracks took place. This was the last big scale operation against British forces that occurred in the Mid-Tipperary Brigade area. The decision to carry out the operation was taken at a Brigade Council meeting some weeks earlier and the preparations and plans were left in the hands of the Brigade Vice-Commandant, Jim Stapleton. He decided to rely almost entirely on men from the 3rd Battalion.

The barracks, garrisoned by about 20 policemen, was a semi-detached two-storeyed structure. It was adjoined by a publichouse and shop belonging to Michael Meagher. As a precaution against Meagher's house being used by the I.R.A. in an attack on the barracks, the authorities had, months before, sealed off the upstairs room in Meagher's premises that abutted from the dividing wall between the two houses. We had learned from some source that I now forget that the police had placed a number of mines in that room.

The precautionary measures of the police prevented Stapleton from resorting to the most usual method employed by the I.R.A. in assaults on R.I.C. posts that were adjacent to other houses - get access to the roof of the house next door and from there burst the roof of the barracks so that petrol or paraffin could be thrown through the broken roof followed by bombs or lighted torches to set the police station in flames. As an alternative, Stapleton decided to try the "Allowee" bomb. This was a bomb made by rolling a stick of gelignite between the hands into the shape of a ball. A detonator with a short length of fuse affixed was then inserted into the gelignite and a coating of sticky mud, locally called "Allowee" was plastered over the gelignite. This mud retained its adhesive qualities for two or three days after being removed from its

natural source. This bomb, in the hands of a competent man, could be thrown with accuracy for a distance of up to 50 yards. The fuse, of course, had to be lit by a match or a lighter.

The bomb stuck to whatever it hit and exploded. Stapleton reckoned, and correctly so, that if he could succeed in getting enough bombs stuck to the barrack roof, the explosions would blow off the slates. With the slates removed he believed it should be possible to set the barracks on fire by showering bottles of petrol through the openings in the roof into the interior of the building, followed up by mud bombs which, on bursting, would cause the petrol to inflame.

The mud bombs were made in the Seskin district in the days immediately before the attack. There was no shortage of gelignite, detonators and fuse and the mud casing was to be had in abundance, so that hundreds of them were prepared. The petrol was also plentiful enough and over 30 men were assigned to the task of filling the bottles from tin containers which were to be stored in the church grounds, 50 or 60 yards from the barracks. These men would bring the bottles filled with petrol from the church to a yard at the back of Meagher's house in which the men selected for the throwing of the bombs and bottles of petrol would operate. This yard had a front wall that ran in a straight line with the back wall of the barracks and a side wall which was a continuation of the gable of the barracks. It joined the barracks itself at the gable and the back wall and was immune from rifle fire or hand grenades since no loophole close enough to the corner had been cut which would enable the police to shoot or throw anything into it. Access to yards was protected too by a wing of Meagher's house.

The main road through the village of Borrisoleigh passed

in front of the barracks opposite which were fields. A party of ten riflemen were detailed for positions behind fences in these fields for the purpose of keeping the police engaged while the assault progressed from there.

The roads between Borrisoleigh and Nenagh, Templemore and Thurles were heavily barricaded and entrenched in many places by the local I.R.A. companies. On the Thurles road two ambush parties awaited reinforcements at Inch and Ballycahill; another ambush party waited on the Templemore road at <sup>Gortaloough</sup> Loughmore while eight or nine men were placed at intervals along the Nenagh road to snipe reinforcements.

In all, I would estimate that between 400 and 500 men participated in this operation. Stapleton was very thorough and careful in his preparations and most confident as to the outcome.

I joined the party who were assembled at Seskin manufacturing the mud bombs on a Sunday evening, and it was on the following Tuesday night the attack occurred. It started about 11 p.m. with a burst of rifle fire and then the bombs were thrown. I was in the yard engaged in the latter job. Broken slates from the roof were soon flying all over the place and bottles of petrol were going in dozens through the roof. Not alone was the top of the barracks a mass of smoke and fire, but sheets of flames were also running down along the outside walls of the buildings. For a time it looked as if there was nothing to prevent the attacks from being a success. Requests to surrender were shouted at the police every now and again, but each time there was a derisive answer of defiance.

The assault continued for hours. At times we stopped, thinking that at last there was nothing left of the building,

but with each relaxation of our efforts the flames would gradually die out.

The garrison at no stage showed any sign of wavering. As the night wore on their rifle fire was as brisk as at the start and Verey lights continued to be sent out in the hope of attracting reinforcements.

I don't think it was far from dawn when Stapleton suggested to me that we should withdraw. He then saw no hope of capturing or even burning the barracks and he was also thinking that reinforcements might soon arrive from Templemore, only five miles distant. I agreed with him and we abandoned the attack. The signal to retire was arranged to be the ringing of the church bell in Borrisoleigh Church. This was chosen by Stapleton because he knew it would annoy the local parish priest who was strongly opposed to us.

The retiral took place along the Pallas road. A good number of the men who, like myself, were 'on the run', stayed in billets four or five miles from Borrisoleigh. Expecting reprisals might take place around that village, I went back the following day with a force of about 30 men and waited outside the village all that day and during the ensuing night, but there was no sign of enemy forces misbehaving themselves. I then left the locality for brigade headquarters in Forgestown

Just a short time before the attack on Borrisoleigh, a labouring man named Patrick Meagher, who lived in a labourer's cottage in Mount Kinnane,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the former place, was taken from his home at night by a party of I.R.A. men under the local company captain, Tommy Kirwan, and shot as a spy. Kirwan was in charge of the firing party. The executed man had been associating for a good while before with the R.I.C. He generally left his home at night and met the police in

Borrisoleigh where he'd rank with them in the pubs. A number of warnings had been given him that consorting with the enemy might have fatal consequences for him, but he ignored these warnings.

*Mahris*  
Meagher's home was in a locality that was much used by "wanted" I.R.A. men where they received food and shelter. Raids made by the enemy on houses frequented by I.R.A. men indicated that information was coming to the police from some person residing in the neighbourhood. The finger of suspicion naturally pointed at *Mahri* Meagher and, when he declined to desist from associating with the police after having been warned to do so, I had no hesitation in approving of the sentence of death which had been passed on him by the local I.R.A. officer.

On the same night as Borrisoleigh barracks was attacked the R.I.C. posts in Gortrabeg and Templetoohy were fired at by members of the local companies and, on the next day, the police barracks in Barnane was sniped by Barnane Volunteers assisted by a few men from Borrisofarney.

From 1st to 11th July 1921, my time was spent at the brigade headquarters in Forgestown where most of my time was devoted to routine matters affecting the administration of the brigade.

I have been asked if we had any regular "agents" among the enemy forces in the brigade area who co-operated in intelligence work. At no time during the period from 1914 to the Truce had we direct access to inner secrets of the I.R.A. or military headquarters, and only an odd policeman here and there gave information of any importance. One outstanding example was Sergeant Hurley, the Corkman, who

was stationed in Thurles. Though the mails were raided in all parts of the brigade area on numerous occasions, I do not remember a single instance where anything of value was unearthed by the censoring of letters taken in these raids.

Signed: Jas. Leahy

Date: 3rd July 1956

Witness: H. Griffin

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BUREO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
NO. W.S. 1454

APPENDIX 2.List of companies and company captains in originalThurles Battalion.

(1)	Ballycahill	-	Captain	-	Phil Purcell
(2)	Boherlahan	-	"	-	Paddy Leahy
(3)	Borrisoleigh	-	"	-	Michael Small
(4)	Castleiney	-	"	-	Jim Duggan
(5)	Clonmore	-	"	-	Martin Deegan
(6)	Drum	-	"	-	Phil Fogarty.
(7)	Drumbane	-	"	-	Tom Ryan
(8)	Glengole	-	"	-	Johnny Norton
(9)	Gortnahoe	-	"	-	Mick Bartley
(10)	Holycross	-	"	-	John Ryan
(11)	Inch (The Milestone)	"	"	-	Jerry Ryan (Big John)
(12)	Inch (The Ragg)	"	"	-	Michael Ryan
(13)	Killea	-	"	-	John Fogarty
(14)	Loughmore	-	"	-	Eamon McGrath
(15)	Moycarkey	-	"	-	Jerry Ryan
(16)	Moyne	-	"	-	John Fanning
(17)	Templemore	-	"	-	Thomas Hanley
(18)	Templetuohy	-	"	-	Jack Hynes
(19)	The Commons	-	"	-	Michael Kealy
(20)	Thurles	-	"	-	Patrick Ryan (The Brigadier)
(21)	Twomileborris	"	"	-	Paddy Hayes
(22)	Upperchurch	-	"	-	Paddy Kinnane.

Officers of original Thurles Battalion:

Commandant	- James Leahy
Vice	" - Ned McGrath
Adjutant	- Matt Butler
Q/M	- Séan Sullivan.

APPENDIX 3.

Officers of No. 2 (Mid) Tipperary Brigade.

Brigade Commandant	-	James Leahy
" Vice Comdt.	-	Michael ("Mixey") O'Connell
" Adjutant	-	Michael Kennedy
" Quartermaster	-	John Cormack.

Michael O'Connell was arrested in June, 1919, and was replaced by Ned McGrath, who acted as Vice Commandant until the end of 1920 when he was arrested. McGrath was succeeded by Jim Stapleton, who filled the post up to the Truce.

The Adjutant, Michael Kennedy, was arrested in April, 1921. His successor was Michael Hynes.

The Quartermaster, John Cormack, was arrested about March, 1921. Michael Dwan, who replaced him, acted only for about six or seven weeks, when he was taken prisoner. Thomas Meagher, Annefield, was then appointed and he carried out for the remainder of the period of hostilities.

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APPENDIX 3 (contd.)

Battalion Officers No. 2 (Mid) Tipperary Brigade.

No. 1 Battalion (Thurles):

Commandant - Jerry Ryan, who filled the post until January, 1921, when he was appointed organiser of Dáil Courts. He was succeeded by Mick Small.

Vice Comdt.- Mick Small, up to January, 1921, then promoted Commandant and replaced by Michael Eustace. The latter was arrested a week later and my brother Paddy took his place

Adjutant - William Donnelly.

Q/M - James K. O'Dwyer, who was arrested in January, 1921, followed by Phil Shanahan who held the post until the Truce.

No. 2 Battalion (Templemore):

Commandant - Jack Scott

Vice Comdt.- Michael Egan

Adjutant - James Russell

Q/M - Joe Ryan.

No. 3 Battalion (Upperchurch):

Commandant - Paddy Kinnane

Vice Comdt.- Jack Fahy

Adjutant - Jack Dunne

Q/M - Tom Gleeson.

