

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1475

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1475.

Witness

Patrick Kinnane,
Upperchurch,
Thurles,
Co. Tipperary.

Identity.

Commandant, 3rd Battalion, 2nd (Mid) Tipperary
Brigade.

Subject.

Activities of Mid-Tipperary Brigade, Irish
Volunteers, 1919-1921, and of Battalion
Flying Column, 1920-1921.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil.

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ORIGINAL

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BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 1,475

STATEMENT BY MR. PATRICK KINNANE,
Upperchurch, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.

O/C, 3rd Battalion, 2nd (Mid) Tipperary Brigade.

I was born in the year 1892 at Finnahy, near Upperchurch, in the County Tipperary. My father was a staunch follower and supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell, and in my early years he was interested in the Sinn Féin movement, then in its infancy. Papers and periodicals, such as "Scissors and Paste" and "The Irish Peasant", came regularly through the post to my father, and, through reading these papers and books like "Speeches from the Dock", I cultivated an interest in Irish history and in Irish affairs.

After Mass on a Sunday in July, 1914, a public meeting was held in Upperchurch at which a company of Irish Volunteers was formed. I cannot now recall who the speakers were at that meeting, nor can I recall the names of the officers of the company when it was formed, but I was one of at least one hundred men and boys who joined it that day. On going home and relating to my father what had occurred in Upperchurch, he warned me to be careful about the organisations which I joined, for, at the time, he was very distrustful of any movements with which the late John E. Redmond, then leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, was associated.

I attended the parades of the company which were held at the creamery in Upperchurch. We had no arms, but we learned a fair share of drill, our instructor being a returned Australian named

William Dwyer.

The company was not long in existence when, with companies from other parishes, it took part in a massed parade of Volunteers which was held on a Sunday in Borrisoleigh. Colonel Maurice Moore, then a member of the Volunteer Executive, addressed this massed parade. A similar parade took place at Barnane, near the Devil's Bit, soon afterwards. I cannot remember the name of the principal speaker at Barnane, but my recollection is that neither he nor Colonel Moore, at Borrisoleigh, gave any hint that all was not well within the movement, nor of the pending split in the Volunteers which took place soon afterwards.

So far as we in Upperchurch were concerned, the split in the Volunteer movement did not affect us, for the simple reason that the company flopped rather suddenly, and parades and drilling ceased. Although there was a branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in the district, no attempt was made to organise Redmond's Volunteers. On the other hand, no one came our way to organise the Irish Volunteers. This, I think, was a great pity, for there were many good, genuine lads in the area who would have been glad to enroll in the latter organisation. My father continued to receive publications of a nationalist or Irish-Ireland nature, and, through them, I kept in touch with the progress of the Irish Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements.

On March 4th, 1916, a big ceilidhe, to which I received an invitation from Patrick (Packy) Ryan of Kilcommon, was held in Doon. This ceilidhe was organised on an extensive scale, and it was attended by

many of the brass hats of the Irish Volunteer movement, including Ernest Blythe, Eamon O'Dwyer of Ballagh, Seumas O'Neill, then a professor in Rockwell College, Michael Sheehan of Dundrum, and Seán Ó Muirthile. I was introduced to most, if not all, of those men during the night, but, as far as I can now recall, no approach was then made to me or to others present to become members of the Volunteers.

On the Tuesday morning of Easter Week 1916, someone, whom I do not remember, called to our house with the news that the Rising had started in Dublin on the previous day. I went at once to Annefield where I knew there was a small company of Irish Volunteers under the leadership of Eddie Meagher of Annefield. The Eddie Meagher of whom I speak was later ordained to the priesthood, and he died recently in the U.S.A. On my arrival, I found Eddie Hayes, Michael Cahill and three or four men of the Butler family assembled with the Meagher family at Meagher's house. They were aware that the Rising had started in Dublin, but they had received no orders as to what they themselves should do. Personally, I had no arms, but some single barrel shotguns and heavy shotgun ammunition were available at Meagher's.

Towards evening, Eamon O'Dwyer, who was then the County Centre of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, called to Meagher's. He said he was on his way to Limerick to make some contacts, and to see what could be done to get the Volunteers in Counties Limerick and Tipperary to join in, and to play their part in the Rising. Before leaving, he instructed Eddie Meagher to mobilise the whole company and to demolish Knock No.7

railway bridge, so as to impede railway communications.

It was the following day by the time the whole company was mobilised, living, as they did, over a scattered area, and, with what tools we could procure, it would have taken us six months to destroy that bridge. Without a good supply of explosives, it was impossible to demolish it, so we contented ourselves by cutting the telegraph wires. On the understanding that they would be available for mobilisation at a moment's notice, most of the men were then permitted to return to their homes and to their work. With a few others, I remained on for about a week at Annefield, to await the return of, or instructions from Eamon O'Dwyer, but the next we heard of him was that he had been captured by the R.I.C. near Killenaule, on his way to Dublin. We then disbanded, and I returned home.

Soon after the Rising of 1916, Seán Broderick of Galway, accompanied by a priest whose name was, I think, Father Freeney, came to our neighbourhood. They were both on the run, and they stayed at Stapleton's of Finnahy. The reason they came to our district was that Broderick was acquainted with a Galway lady, a Miss Walsh, who later became Mrs. Seumas Malone, and who was then a teacher in Drombane. I cannot say how long the priest remained, but Broderick stayed until August 15th 1916, when, with Jack and Eddie Meagher of Annefield, I accompanied him to Dublin. I parted from him at Twoomey's of Little Denmark Street, after we had eluded a Dublin detective who, Broderick noticed, was following us in O'Connell Street.

About this time, too, I was charged by the

R.I.C. with the offence of not having a light on my bicycle at night. I did not attend the court, and I was fined the sum of two shillings and sixpence. As a gesture against English law in this country, and perhaps with the intention of giving the R.I.C. all the trouble I could, I refused to pay the fine when they called to collect it, nor would any of the members of my family pay it. This resulted in my arrest and serving a term of seven days' imprisonment in Limerick prison.

Very early in 1917 - I would say almost immediately after his release from Reading prison - Eamon O'Dwyer swore me into the I.R.B. at his home in Ballagh, and I attended some meetings of the I.R.B. there. He gave me authority to swear in others, and I got a number of carefully picked men to join the Brotherhood.

The next move took place in February 1917, when a branch of the Gaelic League was formed in Upperchurch. The prime mover behind the formation of the branch was Eamon O'Dwyer. Seumas Malone and his brother, Tom, came to Upperchurch as Irish teachers, and Irish classes were also held in Rossmore, Drumbane, The Ragg and Ballagh. Soon afterwards, Sinn Féin clubs were formed in the same areas.

Some few months later, a company of Irish Volunteers was organised which, for the time being, became known as the Upperchurch company, or the Upperchurch Volunteers. The nucleus for the Volunteer company was then there, through the men who had been sworn into the I.R.B. and through the Gaelic League branch and the Sinn Féin club. I was first captain of this company, and its other officers were James Larkin and the late James Stapleton. The strength of

the company was about thirty-five or forty men. No arms were then available, but we held regular parades and practised foot drill.

The next incident to which I will refer is the raid on Molloy's hardware shop in Thurles for explosives and arms, which took place near midnight on the 15th August, 1917. The arrangements, or plans, for the raid were made by the Thurles Volunteers, and I was one of those selected to assist in carrying out the job. Others present that night included Ned O'Reilly, then of Rossmore and now of Cashel, Jack Meagher of Annefield and Jimmy Leahy, later O/C of Tipperary No. 2 brigade. Admission to the premises was gained with the assistance of a Volunteer named Jack Feehan who was an assistant in Molloy's shop. Feehan climbed through a window which he had purposely left open earlier in the night, and then came downstairs and opened the door for us. The keys of the magazine were easily secured, and we carried away a large quantity of gelignite, well over a hundredweight, a number of shotguns and a substantial quantity of shotgun ammunition. We had to carry our booty to the railway bridge near the sportsfield where we loaded it on to a waiting horse and cart. All the stuff was taken that night to Meagher's of Annefield but, later on, the gelignite was brought to my area and, during the conscription crisis period, we transferred some of it to the South Tipperary brigade.

In or about this time too, a British soldier, a native of Kilcommon, came home on leave, bringing, as was the practice, at the time, his rifle with him. I had intended holding him up to take the rifle before he reached his home, but missed him. A few nights later,

three of us, James Larkin, Michael Ryan and myself, raided his house and got the rifle. With the exception of a revolver or two which I had got earlier, this rifle was our first piece of armament for the company. We were assisted in the raid by two other Volunteers, Jeremiah Ryan and Richard Fitzgerald.

The work of organising Volunteer companies continued during the year of 1917, and amongst other places companies were formed at Drumbane, Borrisoleigh, The Ragg and Ballycahill. These four companies, with the Upperchurch company, were formed into the 3rd battalion of the 2nd (or Mid) Tipperary brigade. To the best of my recollection, the battalion was formed early in 1918. The battalion staff elected at the time were:-

Battalion Commandant	- Patrick Kinnane (myself).
Battalion Vice Commandant	- James Stapleton, Finnahy.
Battalion Adjutant	- Sean Dunne, Drumbane.
Battalion Quartermaster	- John Fahy, Upperchurch.

In 1921, James Stapleton went to the brigade staff, and he was succeeded by John Fahy, the Quartermaster, as battalion vice commandant. Thomas Gleeson of Gaile, Cashel, then acted as quartermaster, and he was succeeded by John Meagher of Annefield who held the position of battalion quartermaster for some time before the Truce in 1921.

After the establishment of the battalion, a further company was formed at Milestone, and when the battalion was finally organised, the companies forming it and their O/C's were as follows:-

- A. Company - Drumbane - Captain Thomas Ryan.
- B. Company - Upperchurch - Captain Thomas Kennedy
(later Thomas Stapleton).
- C. Company - Borrisoleigh - Captain Michael Small
(later Thomas Kirwan).
- D. Company - The Ragg - Captain Michael Ryan.
- E. Company - Ballycahill - Captain Philip Purcell.
- F. Company - Milestone - Captain Thomas Carr.

Two further battalions, organised from the companies in the Thurles and Templemore areas, were similarly established, and, in turn, the three battalions were formed into a brigade which became known as the 2nd or Mid Tipperary brigade. James Leahy, then of Thurles and now of Nenagh, was appointed brigade commandant.

At the same time, units of Cumann na mBan were organised in the areas, and thus we were well organised when the country faced the conscription threat in the late spring and early summer of 1918.

As happened generally in most areas, our ranks were swollen with new recruits, while the British Government expressed their determination to extend the Conscription Act to Ireland. Drilling and training were intensified and anti-conscription meetings were held. Arms, principally shotguns, were collected from the owners who, as a rule, parted with them without much fuss, but, in the case of a few of the larger land owners or so-called gentry, it was necessary to raid the houses and seize the guns. Generally speaking, there was an air of independence and defiance of the British Government, but, when the threat of conscription passed, in the autumn

of 1918, this spirit waned, many of those who had then joined the Volunteers left, and by the end of that year we found ourselves back again to the position we were formerly in, as regards strength of numbers and personnel.

Our activities in the early months of 1919 centred chiefly on Gaelic League work, holding of aeriocht, training and organising the Volunteer companies, circulating of An tÓglach, and procuring of arms and ammunition whenever possible. Due to raids by the R.I.C. on my home, I found it necessary to go on the run in the summer of 1919, and I might say that, from then until 1924, I rarely, if ever, slept at home.

On June ~~29th~~^{21st}, 1919, District Inspector Hunt of the R.I.C. was shot dead in Thurles. He had been stationed in Thurles for some years prior to his death, and his unscrupulous and aggressive tactics towards members of the Volunteer and Sinn Féin movements caused much concern to the brigade and battalion officers. When the decision to shoot him was made, it was considered that a suitable opportunity to do so might present itself during the race meeting on June ~~29th~~^{21st}. I was present on the racecourse that day with James Leahy, the brigade O/C, James Stapleton, James Murphy and two other Volunteers whose names I cannot now recall. After we had trailed Hunt around for some time, it became evident that the job could not be done inside the racing enclosure, with any feasible prospect of getting safely away. It was then decided to make the attempt when the races were over. It was expected that he would return on foot, accompanied by some R.I.C. men. I moved down towards Liberty Square where a couple of ladies of my acquaintance engaged me in conversation.

One of them was actually taunting me about the way we were letting Hunt get away with his villainy when, about forty yards away from where we were standing, the shots rang out which brought Hunt's career to a close.

During that year of 1919, too, I had some visits from Sean Treacy, Seumas Robinson, Dan Breen and Sean Hogan when they were eluding pursuit by the R.I.C. after the ambush at Soloheadbeg. They rarely remained more than a few days or a week at a time, and we provided shelter, guards and guides for them.

I might say that the first operation carried out by the battalion as a unit was the attack on Drumbane R.I.C. barracks which took place on January 18th, 1920. Holycross R.I.C. barracks was attacked by units of the 1st battalion on that same night. Drumbane was in my battalion area, and the plans for the attack were prepared by Jim Stapleton, the battalion vice commandant, Sean Dunne, the battalion adjutant, and myself. The barracks itself was a one-storied building, originally used as a concert and dance hall, which had been taken over by the R.I.C. for use as a barracks. Our original idea was to hold the garrison within the barracks, with rifle and shotgun fire, and to force them to surrender, by setting fire to the roof. Later, we were advised that a more effective way of capturing the barracks would be to blow in the gable end wall with a charge of the gelignite which had been taken in the raid on Molloy's, two and a half years before. The latter plan was decided on.

Paddy O'Dwyer and Jim O'Gorman, both officers of the Hollyford company of the 3rd battalion, South Tipperary brigade, came to assist us, and, under Jim O'Gorman's direction, the charge of gelignite was

prepared in the house I now reside in, in Upperchurch. Selected men from the Upperchurch and Drumbane companies were chosen to take part in the attack, and units from the other companies were put on outpost duty on the roads leading to the village. Our arms consisted principally of shotguns, with a few Martini rifles, and either two or three service rifles.

When we got to the assembly point near Drumbane, some of the local Volunteers reported that two or three members of the R.I.C. garrison were gone out on patrol. A small party of our men, in charge of the battalion adjutant, followed the patrol, captured the two or three R.I.C. men, and held them prisoners while the attack was on.

We experienced no difficulty in surrounding the barracks, or in placing the charge of gelignite against the gable wall. Everything, so far, was done without a sound. Our first reverse, however, came with the explosion of the gelignite. It failed to breach or destroy the gable wall, but split it to such an extent that, through the cracked wall, we could see the light inside the barracks. We felt so confident that the gelignite would demolish the wall and make easy our task of capturing the barracks that we had abandoned the idea of setting it on fire, and had no materials with us to put this alternative plan into operation. It was, however, then too late for regrets, and after a short exchange of fire and after the R.I.C. had fired several Verey lights for assistance, it was decided to call off the attack. In addition to the patrol, there was another R.I.C. man captured on his way back

to the barracks, just before the explosion took place. He was unarmed, and we kept him a prisoner until about an hour after the abandonment, when we left him in a farmer's hay barn, about a mile from Drumbane.

At that time, although brigade and battalion areas were well defined, men did not always confine their activities to their own areas. Men invited to assist in an attack on an enemy post or in an ambush in another area did not hesitate to go. This was easily understandable and was not discouraged. I might add that during those years there was at least as much, if not more, co-operation between my battalion, the 3rd battalion of the South Tipperary brigade, the 6th battalion of the North Tipperary brigade, and with the Doon battalion of the East Limerick brigade, than with the other two battalions of the Mid Tipperary brigade. Our four areas bordered on each other, and comprised what I will call hilly district on the borders of Counties Tipperary and Limerick.

Thus it was that, when Yank McCarthy, commandant of the Doon battalion, decided to attack the R.I.C. barracks in Doon, he invited Jim Stapleton, James Larkin, myself and some others from the Upperchurch area to assist him. This attack on Doon barracks took place on the night of March 7th, 1920. The plans were more or less on a par with those which I have mentioned in connection with the attack on Drumbane - the main idea being to breach the gable wall of the barracks with charges of gelignite, but on this occasion the gelignite was placed between the wall and planks, buttressed to the ground. Tadhg O'Dwyer, Ned O'Reilly and Jim O'Gorman of the 3rd battalion, South Tipperary brigade,

had made successful experiments with gelignite on those lines, and they had come to Doon to try it out for the first time that night, in an actual attack on a barracks.

My position that night was at the front of the barracks, with a small party of riflemen and shotgun men. Our instructions were to open fire on the barracks immediately the gelignite exploded. It was snowing heavily and, as far as I am aware, the explosives party had no difficulty in getting the explosives to the gable wall and fixing the charges. Again, the gelignite let us down, for, instead of breaching the wall as we expected, the explosions just simply blew the planks away. It is my opinion that the planks were not sufficiently staunch with supports, but it must be appreciated that the work of fixing the charges had to be done silently and hurriedly without attracting the attention of the garrison within the barracks. The failure to breach the wall practically ended this attack at Doon, for the barracks was a strong, stone building and we had only fired a few shots per man when the signal to withdraw was given.

The next incident which I can recall was an attack on Cappawhite R.I.C. barracks which took place sometime after the attack at Doon. Cappawhite was also in the East Limerick brigade area. I am not altogether familiar with the plans of this attack, but I remember that an attempt was made to set the barrack roof on fire. Jim Stapleton, Tom Stapleton and Martin Ryan accompanied me to Cappawhite, and our position was in a house opposite to the barracks. Another I remember as being there was Jim O'Gorman of the South Tipperary brigade. There was some delay in getting started, and the attack

was on for quite a time before the efforts to set the roof on fire showed any signs of being successful. The fire was, in fact, only getting a grip when the attack was called off as information was received that British reinforcements were on their way from Tipperary town. From Cappawhite, we brought a wounded Volunteer to Hollyford where he received medical assistance. He was wounded in the leg, and he had lost a lot of blood. Dr. Power of Borrisoleigh was sent for, and, after attending to him, he conveyed the wounded man safely to Thurles hospital. Thinking further back over the events, I now remember that this attack on Cappawhite R.I.C. barracks did not take place until June 4th, 1920. It occurred on the same night as Drangan barracks was attacked and captured by the 3rd Tipperary brigade.

On March 4th, 1920, Jim Stapleton, Jim Larkin and Pat O'Brien entered Fanning's (now Ryan's) publichouse at the Ragg, to disarm two R.I.C. men who were inside. The R.I.C. men were sitting on the counter and, when ordered to put up their hands, one of them did so, but the other got inside the counter. There followed an exchange of shots between this R.I.C. man and Larkin, in which the R.I.C. man was shot dead. Due to faulty ammunition, Stapleton's and O'Brien's guns failed to work that night. Immediately following this incident, Lieutenant Thomas O'Dwyer of the Ragg company was shot dead in his bed by R.I.C. raiders. A Volunteer named McCarthy was shot dead in his home in Thurles on the same night. They were the first victims in this area of the R.I.C. murder gang.

On Sunday, June 7th, 1920, there was an exchange of shots between some local Volunteers in Drumbane and

a British army officer who passed on a motor-cycle. Volunteer Thomas Brett was wounded in the firing, and he died from his wounds in the Mater hospital, Dublin, on June 19th, 1920.

Around that time too, in the summer of 1920, two Volunteers of the Borrisoleigh company - Jim Russell and Martin O'Shea, - while unarmed, captured and disarmed a Black and Tan in Borrisoleigh. A somewhat similar incident occurred about the same time at Milestone where a few local Volunteers, acting on their own initiative, captured and disarmed a Black and Tans who had ventured out about a mile from Shevry R.I.C. barracks.

Towards the end of June and first week of July, 1920, Volunteers were mobilised on two occasions to attack Shevry barracks. These were brigade jobs, and men from the 1st battalion with men from my own battalion, in addition to some men from the 3rd battalion, 3rd Tipperary brigade, were assembled to carry out the task. I am not familiar with what plans were prepared to take the barracks, but as I distinctly remember that a supply of paraffin oil was brought along, I assume that the intention was to attempt to take it by setting it on fire. There was, however, lack of detail in the planning, for when we arrived at the assembly point near Shevry, it was discovered that the house nearest to the barracks was across the road and too far away to be of any use to us as a point of attack. We also learned that the barracks had recently been fortified and loopholed, and we assumed that mines had been laid in the ground, close in to the barrack walls. It was then decided to abandon the attempt until further preparations were made. That was on a Saturday night, possibly the last Saturday

night of June, 1920.

On the following Saturday night, we again mobilised for the second attempt to attack this barracks. On this occasion, the brigade commandant sent a party of men to erect a barricade on the Thurles-Shevry road, and to occupy an ambush position at the barricade. This party were instructed to engage any reinforcements for the R.I.C. garrison that might be sent from Thurles.

We then proceeded to the assembly point from where we could see the barracks. While there, we saw a lorry load of military and police arrive and enter the barracks. We waited all night for the lorry and its occupants to leave, but daylight came and still no sign of it taking its departure. We concluded that somehow or other the British authorities in Thurles had got wind of the proposed attack, and that the lorry load of troops and R.I.C. had been sent out as reinforcements. We decided to withdraw, and the men disbanded in small groups. Later, we learned that this lorry and its escort were just calling to Shevry with supplies from Thurles. As they passed, they had been fired on by the men who had been detailed to block and hold the Thurles road and who, at the time the lorry came along, had not got the barricade erected. Some of the occupants of the lorry had been wounded, and apparently fearing to face the journey back in the night, the whole party had decided to remain in the shelter of the barracks until morning.

One of those with me that night at Shevry was Captain Michael Small of the Borrisoleigh company. He was anxious to get away to attend to the milking of cows and to go to early Mass and Holy Communion in

Borrisoleigh, so he left soon after the decision was made to call off the attack. He was carrying a Lee Enfield rifle, and he crossed the road, about a quarter of a mile from the barracks, on the Thurles side. The lorry and its party left the barracks a little later - the lorry moving silently down the hill. The military and police in the lorry saw Small as he entered or crossed the field, opened fire on him and shot him dead. We heard the firing, but did not think that anything serious had happened, for it was a custom then for British forces to fire a few volleys when leaving a town or village. On the following day, we received word that Small had not returned to his home. Later that day, on hearing that there was a dead man in Templemore military barracks, we sent some people there who identified the remains as those of Michael Small. Two other men, Tom Stapleton and Ned Corbett, had a miraculous escape that morning. They had been with the party on the Thurles road all night and were cycling in to Shevry, to find out what was happening, when they encountered the military lorry at the time the shots were fired at Mick Small. Discarding their bicycles, they took to the fields, and succeeded in escaping, although pursued and fired on by the police and military.

On the next Sunday night, July 12th, 1920, Rearcross R.I.C. barracks in Tipperary No. 1 brigade area was attacked. This attack was fully described by Ernie O'Malley in his articles which appeared in the "Sunday Press" editions of 11th December, 1955, 18th December, 1955, 25th December, 1955 and 1st January, 1956. With the exception of a few minor details, O'Malley's account of the engagement is substantially correct. The plans were originally prepared by Paddy Ryan (Lacken) who,

failing to obtain the support of his own (Tipperary No. 1) brigade for the project, secured assistance from Tipperary No. 3 brigade, the East Limerick brigade and from my battalion. The attack was planned to commence on the preceding Saturday night, i.e., Saturday night, July 11th, 1920, and on that night, Jim Stapleton, Tom Stapleton, Jack Fahy and myself drove in a horse and cart, by a back road, to Foilduff, near Rearcross, where the men were assembling. Amongst those present were Ernie O'Malley, who took charge of the operation, Seumas Robinson, Sean Treacy, Tadhg O'Dwyer, commandant of the 3rd battalion, South Tipperary brigade, and our old friends, Paddy Dwyer and Jim O'Gorman of Hollyford.

Later that night, when it was made known that the attack was postponed until Sunday night, the four of us who had travelled together, returned home again, leaving behind our four Lee Enfield rifles and a pump and hose which we had taken with us.

On the following night, Tom Stapleton was unable to come, but Jim Stapleton, Tom Fahy and myself, this time riding on horseback, went again to the assembly point near Rearcross. We collected our rifles, but when the final details for the attack were settled, we had no use for them as we were posted to Flannery's shop.

Flannery's shop was situated next door to the barracks. Both were long, two-storied stone buildings, under the same roof, and separated only by a single dividing wall. Flannery's carried on, in addition to a bar, grocery and general hardware shop, a small hotel business, and as I had stayed there, I was familiar with the lay-out of the house, and that was the reason

why I was posted with the party who took it over. The lay-out of the barracks and the steps taken by the British to fortify it against attack are described accurately in those articles of O'Malley's to which I have referred, but I am not sure if he mentioned that the barracks itself was divided into three portions by two internal stone walls, and this later defence precaution was to have a big bearing on the final outcome of the engagement. While I am not positive on the point, I would say that the strength of the garrison in the barracks would approximate to about eighteen or twenty men.

Jim Stapleton, Jack Fahy, Jim O'Gorman and myself entered Flannery's house through a low, back window. It was then near midnight, and the people of the house had retired to bed. We roused them and, when we told them what we were about to do, I must say that they accepted the position cheerfully enough. We were joined in the house by four or five other Volunteers, all I believe from the Hollyford company. O'Malley was in and out of the house several times during the night. In the top room next to the barracks, we filled a barrel with paraffin oil, of which there was an ample supply on the premises, as Flannery's sold it in their shop. Jim O'Gorman then climbed through a trap-door in the ceiling of this room, and, with a hammer, broke a hole in the slates as near as possible to the barrack roof. Reaching an arm out through the hole, he fired five or six shots rapidly with his revolver through the slates of the barrack roof, his intention being not only to break the slates but also to scare away any R.I.C. men who might be upstairs in that end of the barracks.

The next thing, so far as we were concerned, was to bring the pump and the hose into play. With the hose running through the trap door and through the hole in the roof, Stapleton and I took turns at the pump, in pumping the paraffin oil from the barrel on to that section of the barrack roof nearest to Flannery's house. O'Gorman soon had that part of the roof burning. So far, I might say, our task in the house was only child's play. We worked in the knowledge that we were perfectly safe. If the police made a sortie out of the barracks to attack us in Flannery's, they would have been met not only by the armed men in the house but also by a volley of fire from a party of riflemen, who, in charge of Paddy O'Dwyer of Hollyford, had the entrance to the barracks covered from a position behind the wall of the chapel yard. A sergeant, who did come out the front door to reconnoitre just as the attack on the roof started, was shot dead by our riflemen. From the time O'Gorman fired the first shots, a light rifle fire on the barracks was maintained by this party, and the garrison replied with everything they had, machine-guns, rifles, grenades and Verey lights.

I would say that the roof was burning for about twenty minutes or half an hour before that portion of it over the section of the barracks nearest to Flannery's caved in. However, the fire did not, as we hoped it would, carry over the dividing wall and ignite the roof over the centre section of the barracks, but with the aid of the pump and hose, we succeeded in drenching it with plenty of paraffin which O'Gorman set afire, by throwing lighted rags and burning sods of turf on to it. Again, this portion burnt until it caved in, but again the

dividing wall prevented the fire from igniting the third or end section of the roof. It was in this end section of the barracks that the R.I.C. garrison held out. Several times they were called upon to surrender, but their reply was usually an extra heavy volley of fire. The pump and hose failed us at that time. Either the distance was too great for the hose to carry the paraffin, or else the pump had been overworked. We then resorted to throwing bottles of paraffin, stones and burning sods of turf on to the roof. Some small fires started, but burnt themselves out without doing much damage.

After some hours of fruitless effort, I considered that we could do nothing further from Flannery's house, so I went, with some others, to the yard at the back of the shop. From the cover of a high wall which separated Flannery's yard from the barracks, we continued to throw bottles of paraffin and lighted missiles on to the roof, but with little success. O'Malley, Seán Treacy and, I think, Dan Breen, were then in the yard. They were discussing what our next move should be, when a grenade burst in the yard. Everyone present received some kind of a wound or another; fortunately, no one was seriously injured. Personally, I only received a slight scratch on the hand, but O'Malley was hit in the back by a splinter. While he was being attended to, scouts reported that enemy reinforcements were approaching Rearcross, along a back road. Acting on this report, the decision to call off the attack was made, and so ended the fight at Rearcross. The report that enemy reinforcements were approaching was subsequently proved to be unfounded. What was seen by a scout on the hills and was mistaken for lorries, was a hearse and a funeral

carriage. It is my belief that this mistaken report saved the day for the R.I.C. garrison. A little longer, and ways and means would certainly have been found to get that third section of the barracks on fire, and leave them with no option but to die in it or surrender.

The next incident of note which I recall was the ambush of an R.I.C. patrol on the Thurles-Shevry road. A short time before the ambush, Sergeant Igoe (later leader of the R.I.C. murder gang) had been transferred to Shevry R.I.C. barracks. We were tipped off about him by the 1st battalion staff who asked us to try and get him. At that time, a patrol of four to eight R.I.C. men went regularly, almost daily, from Shevry to Upperchurch. On July 30th, 1920, Michael Ryan, Jim and Tom Stapleton, Thomas Gleeson and myself lay in ambush for the patrol at a point about 150 yards from Upperchurch Cross, as one goes towards Shevry. Two others, Paddy Boyle and Paddy Phelan, acted as scouts. For some reason which I cannot now recall, Jim Stapleton and I seemed to have been positively certain that Igoe would be with the patrol on that particular day, but he was not. On that day, the patrol consisted of four R.I.C., and we had a perfect view of them from the ambush position as they came along the road, until they were within two hundred yards of us. They were then hidden from our view by a bend in the road. Whilst out of our sight, two of the policemen must have delayed or dropped back, for only two came properly into the ambush position. Both were killed by our first volley. We then got out into the road and gave chase to, and fired on the other two, but they succeeded in making good their escape back to the barracks which was only about

one mile away. Returning to the scene of the ambush, we collected the rifles and revolvers belonging to the two dead R.I.C. men. That night, military and police from Thurles burned Upperchurch creamery and Phelan's house at Curraduff as reprisals. They also made an attack on James Larkin's house, wounding James Larkin's brother.

Later - on the night of August 15th or early in the morning of August 16th, 1920 - Jimmy Leahy, the brigade O/C, Jim Stapleton, John Fahy and myself left Upperchurch in a car driven by Jack Ryan of Thurles. We were bound for Templemore, and our object was to shoot District Inspector Wilson of the R.I.C. I am not now sure whether the order to shoot Wilson was a G.H.Q. or a brigade headquarters order. The car was owned by a Mr. Sonny McGrath of Thurles whose mother then lived in Templemore, and, to avoid any suspicion on the part of the R.I.C., we parked the car outside Mrs. McGrath's house in Patrick Street, Templemore. The driver, Jack Ryan, remained in the car.

We expected Wilson to pass through Patrick Street on his way to the R.I.C. barracks. After waiting for some hours at the house of Michael Kelly (next door to Mrs. McGrath's) who was a Volunteer, Jim Stapleton crossed to a house at the opposite side - someone may have called him over. Soon afterwards, we saw Wilson coming along, walking on our side of the street, and Leahy signalled to Stapleton that Wilson was on the way. When about forty yards away from where we were standing at Kelly's door, Wilson crossed the street to the side Jim Stapleton was on, and as he passed, we saw him glance fairly hard at Stapleton. Stapleton followed

him a pace or two, and then, with his revolver almost resting off Wilson's shoulder, he fired point blank at his head. Wilson fell forward, dead.

In preparation for our getaway, we had the car turned and ready to go, before Wilson came along, and we had also decided on an alternative line of retreat. It was by this alternative line of retreat that we left Templemore. It took us through an archway to the demesne, across the demesne, and moving quickly cross country we reached Barnane where we rested. Later that day, from the slopes of the mountains near Barnane, we saw the town hall in Templemore ablaze. It was burned as a reprisal by the British military who also burned Michael Kelly's house where we had waited for Wilson that morning.

Following the attack on the R.I.C. patrol near Upperchurch cross-roads to which I have already referred, Sergeant Igoe was transferred from Shevry R.I.C. station to the station in Thurles. He had interrogated Michael Ryan of Curraduff about the ambush, and I remember him (Ryan) telling me that he felt that, if Igoe ever got anything against him, Igoe would not hesitate to shoot him. Ryan was then a prominent member of the Volunteers and of the Sinn Féin organisation. At the time, as a result of the activities of the R.I.C. murder gang in other areas in Co. Tipperary, I had warned all prominent Volunteers, and the brothers of prominent Volunteers, in my area never to sleep at home at night. On the night of October 25th, 1920, a dance was held in Upperchurch. It was over about 1 a.m. on the morning of October 26th, and as the hour was so late, my two brothers, Jim and Jerome, went home when the dance was

over. Willie Gleeson, brother of Thomas Gleeson, also went to his home after the dance.

On that same night, the R.I.C. murder gang left Thurles barracks and went to Shevry barracks. From there, they went to Ryan's of Curraduff, and found Michael Ryan in his home. He was ill at the time, and had gone home to rest and to recuperate. He was alone in the house with his mother and two sisters. The murder gang demanded admittance, and shot him dead in his sick bed. From Ryan's, the murder gang went to Jim Stapleton's home at Finnahy. Jim's parents were alone in the house that night, and, failing to find Jim, the raiders shot some geese in the farmyard, and then proceeded to my house.

Here, the raiders, who had their faces blackened, found Jim and Jerome in bed. They took them out to the yard, and put them standing there in their night attire. A local R.I.C. sergeant, Sergeant Cotter, was called to identify them, and he confirmed for the raiders that I was not there. The murder gang then held a conversation for a few minutes, after which, in my parents' presence, they told the two boys to kneel down as they were going to shoot them. Jim, however, had other ideas and, giving Jerome a little nudge, together they made a dash for the gate which the raiders had left open. As they ran, they were fired on, and Jerome was hit by a bullet which entered under his left shoulder and passed clean through his body. He continued to run, and, in the laneway, they were again fired on by another party of R.I.C. men, which resulted in Jerome receiving a further wound in the calf of his leg. He managed to continue

across a field where himself and Jim became separated. Jim, who was unhurt, came to where four or five of us were in a disused house. He told us what had happened at home, and, at that time, he was positive that Jerome too had escaped unhurt.

We collected our arms and went to my house, but the murder gang had taken their departure. Needless to remark, my parents were in a state of distress, as they were sure that both Jim and Jerome were dead. The sight of Jim, and his news that Jerome was alright, cheered them but, as the time passed, there was no sign of Jerome returning. Shortly after daylight in the morning, he was found by some neighbours, lying in a turnip field. He was in a complete state of exhaustion from exposure and loss of blood. Dr. Power of Borrisoleigh was brought to attend to him, and he conveyed him to Thurles hospital. The R.I.C. discovered that he was in Thurles hospital, and they interrogated him there. Later, we received information that the murder gang intended to take him from the hospital and shoot him, so we arranged to have him removed secretly to his aunt's house in Glastrican where he remained until after the Truce. Four years passed before he was fully recovered from his wounds and from that night's ordeal.

To return, however, to the murder gang and to their activities on that early morning of October 26th, 1920. After leaving our house, they went to the residence of Tom Gleeson at Moher. Tom was not there, but, as I have mentioned, his brother, Willie, had gone home after the dance in Upperchurch. They searched for Tom and, failing to find him, they took Willie out of the house and shot him dead, on the roadside.

It was, as far as I can now recollect, in the following month - November, 1920. - that we organised a battalion flying column. The strength of the column was approximately twenty men, but this number varied from time to time, and then again there were periods when we broke up into small parties of four or five, so as to ease the problem of billeting accommodation, and to avoid large scale rounding up operations by British forces. All regular members of the column were armed with rifles and, in addition, some had revolvers. Jim Stapleton and myself acted as column leaders.

About a month or six weeks before the formation of the flying column, with two or three Volunteers from the Upperchurch company and a few more from the Borrisoleigh company, I attacked a patrol of four R.I.C. men at Kileskane, near Borrisoleigh. This patrol had left Borrisoleigh to link up with another patrol from Gouldings cross. It was difficult to get a suitable ambush position on that particular road, and we took the only one that offered, which was behind a wall, about two feet high. We were armed with rifles and shotguns. We had not long to wait, for the patrol came along almost at once. They were walking in two's, about thirty yards apart. In anticipation of this, we had divided into two parties. Fire was opened almost simultaneously by our two parties, and two members of the patrol, one of the leading two, and one of the two in the rere, were killed immediately. Some loads of hay on carts came along the road to the ambush position just as we fired at the patrol, and using the carts and hay as cover, the other two policemen succeeded in escaping. We captured the rifles and revolvers of

the two dead constables, and when we examined their ammunition, we found that one of the constables was carrying dum-dum revolver ammunition.

On November 9th, 1920, the column, supported by Seán Hayes, vice commandant of the 7th battalion, 3rd Tipperary brigade, and some others from the South Tipperary brigade, occupied an ambush position at Ross, between Thurles and Nenagh. Our position was on a bye-road, about fifty yards away from and overlooking the main Thurles-Nenagh road. We were not long there - in fact, we had not time to erect a barricade on the main road - when a lorry of troops, going in the direction of Thurles, came along. The driver was hit in our first volley, and the lorry ran up against the ditch, but did not overturn, and after events proved that it was not badly damaged. After an exchange of fire for, say, ten or fifteen minutes and with the spare driver at the wheel, the British troops got the lorry under control and drove away.

There were two or three ambushes on that road near Ross. It is what we call a valley road, running through the hills, and even one local man could snipe safely, from the hillsides there, at lorries or convoys passing along the road below. I remember another occasion when Thomas Kirwan of Borrisoleigh, Jim Stapleton, Sean Dunne, Tommy Gleeson and myself opened fire from the hillsides there at long range on a party of troops who had come out by lorry to fill in a trench in the road. The troops took cover, and we sniped at them for at least two or three hours while the troops replied with rapid and heavy fire. Meanwhile, other lorries of troops were rushed out from Templemore, Thurles and Nenagh, until

there were at least five hundred troops in the vicinity. They deployed out and up both sides of the mountain, took cover, and brought two or three machine guns into action. Continuing to snipe, we gradually withdrew up the mountain side. The British troops were apparently under the impression that we were present in strength, for they displayed the utmost caution and were not inclined to move from their cover. Eventually, we withdrew altogether, and crossed the mountain towards Upperchurch, leaving them raking the mountain side with fire. Later, we were told that there were a number of British soldiers wounded during that engagement.

During the following weeks, we occupied several ambush positions, including one at Lackenmore on November 27th, 1920, without any result. The Lackenmore ambush position was an ideal one, and men from the three Tipperary brigades were assembled there to attack a convoy which was expected to pass between Newport and Rearcross. After waiting all day, from early morning until late at night, and no sign or information of the convoy, it was decided to abandon the ambush position. Again, in November, 1920, an ambush position was occupied for two days by the column at Ballyboy, on the Thurles-Upperchurch road. A ration lorry and its escort were expected to pass, going from Thurles to Shevry barracks. I was present on the first day, but not on the second. Jimmy Leahy, the brigade O'C, was in charge on both days. The first day passed without any incident, but on the second day a lorry of R.I.C., containing, I understand, some members of their murder gang, came along. An accidental shot fired by one of our men warned the occupants of

the lorry before it came into the ambush. The driver put on speed and drove through the position, making debris of a dray cart which had been pulled across the road to act as a barricade. Some shots were fired by both sides but the lorry did not halt.

Early in January, 1921, our column and a column from the 3rd battalion of the 3rd Tipperary brigade occupied a position at Milestone on the Thurles-Newport road, to ambush a convoy of British forces which was expected to pass that way. The position was a good one: the 3rd Tipperary men were on the southern side of the road, and we had a position on the northern side. We were there for two days and, on the evening of the second day, as the convoy had not turned up, it was deemed advisable to evacuate the position. The South Tipperary column moved off in a southerly direction, and my party had withdrawn about a quarter of a mile in a northerly direction along our line of retreat, when lorries of British military and police came along the road. Either the position had been given away, or the British forces saw our scouts, for the lorries halted while still some distance from the ambush position, the occupants dismounted and fired some shots at some of the scouts. Hearing the shots, we assumed that the convoy had come along and that it was being engaged by the South Tipperary column, so we retraced our steps towards the road. We soon discovered that the military and police were in extended order and moving in our direction. We had a skirmish with them, and I will say that it was only the coming of darkness and our knowledge of the countryside that saved us that evening. We were in a group, outnumbered and taken unawares,

while the enemy forces were extended out, and in a position to cut off our retreat. As it was, I consider that we were fortunate to escape without suffering casualties.

On January 21st, 1921, eight members of the column - James Larkin, Jack Fahy, Martin Ryan, Thomas Gleeson, Thomas Kirwan, Paddy and Denis Ryan, and myself - again occupied the ambush position at Ross on the Thurles-Nenagh road. We went there on speculation, for this was a road frequently traversed by British forces. On this day, an armoured car - not one of the turret type, but a lorry protected on the front and sides by, and covered over with steel plates - arrived. It was manned by military, with machine guns protruding from its sides and roof. I believe it was the first of this type of armoured vehicle we had seen. We opened fire on it, but only for a brief period, before we withdrew, for I considered that it would be a useless waste of rifle ammunition, of which we were in short supply, to continue the attack.

It was during the winter of 1920-21 that a friend of mine, Thomas Russell of Borrisoleigh, who was a member of the Borrisoleigh company, was taken out of his home by a party of British military. A reins was put around his neck, and, with no clothes on save his shirt, he was horsewhipped up and down through the river by the military who eventually left him for dead. He is still living, but bears the marks of the horsewhipping to the present day.

In February 1921, elaborate preparations, in which all the brigades in County Tipperary were co-operating, were made to attack Kilcommon R.I.C.

barracks. The task allotted to my battalion was to hold the road from Thurles to Kilcommon. As the attack did not come off, there is not much to be said about it, but I am reminded of it by the fact that George Plunkett arrived at Upperchurch from G.H.Q. in the evening time. He was on some organising mission or other, and when he learned that Kilcommon barracks was to be attacked that night, he was very anxious to go there. As he looked both ill and weary, I told him we had too many men to do the job, and I persuaded him to go to a billet which we secured for him and where I knew he would be both safe and comfortable.

It is difficult now to recall the sequence of the events, and the events themselves, in that springtime and early summer of 1921. There were several rounds-up in the Upperchurch and Finahy areas by massed forces of military, assisted by R.I.C. men. One of those took place on the Sunday after the skirmish near Milestone, and resulted in the capture of two Volunteers. One of these Volunteers, when being interrogated in Templemore barracks, was put standing, with a grenade in his hand. He was ordered to pull out the pin, and his interrogators standing a safe distance away, ordered him under threat of shooting to release the lever. As he considered that he might as well be killed by the grenade as to be shot and as he had previously denied all knowledge of the Volunteers and displayed no indications of training, he did so, but there was no explosion. The grenade apparently had not been detonated. After that ordeal, his interrogation ceased.

There was another morning when more than twenty lorry loads of Auxiliaries, R.I.C. and military

surrounded the Finnahy area. They spent the whole day rounding up and searching, but fortunately the column had been billeted the previous night outside the ring of the enemy forces, and during the day we viewed their activities from a nearby hill. It was difficult too to find suitable targets for the column, for the British forces were then moving in strongly protected convoys. Sniping of enemy posts to keep the garrisons harassed was then one of our favourite forms of activity.

On Sunday, May 22nd, 1921, the column was mobilised in the Upperchurch area, with the intention of moving off towards Templederry. That evening, there were some special devotions on in the church in Upperchurch, and, although we had been told by the priests that it was not necessary for us to incur the danger involved in leaving the countryside to attend Mass or devotions, seven of us went to the devotions. Afterwards, four of our party, Con Gleeson, John Ryan and two Tom Stapleton's, went to O'Dwyer's shop to purchase cigarettes, whilst Jim Stapleton, John Fahy and myself stood at the church gates. We saw lorries of military and Black and Tans turn off the main road at Upperchurch Cross and drive at high speed towards the village. We alerted the four boys in Dwyer's shop, and they left by the back door and headed up the hill towards a bye-road leading to Templederry. This was always considered a safe line of retreat but, on this particular evening, there was, to everyone's surprise, a party of Auxiliaries halted on a hill on the bye road leading to Borrisoleigh. There was a sharp exchange of shots between our four men, who were armed with revolvers only, and the Auxiliaries which resulted in Con Gleeson

being shot dead, John Ryan being wounded and captured, and one of the Tom Stapleton's captured. Before being captured, Ryan and Stapleton succeeded in securely hiding their revolvers. The other Tom Stapleton got safely away.

After alerting the four boys at O'Dwyer's, Jim Stapleton, Fahy and myself returned to the church, and, by a passage known only to a few, we entered a secret hiding place or dump which was situated under the floor of the church at the back of the altar. The British forces entered and searched the church, and took out and maltreated people who were praying there. Our hiding place was not discovered, and we remained there until the sacristan came with the news of what had happened, and gave us the all-clear signal.

In June, 1921, we decided to attack Borrisoleigh R.I.C. barracks. This was a strongly fortified post, garrisoned by at least twenty R.I.C. men and situated within five miles of Templemore military barracks. It also lay between Thurles and Nenagh, and there were strong military and police garrisons in both of these towns. Looking back on the incident now, what strikes me most about it is not our failure to capture it, or that we left Borrisoleigh without a casualty, but the open way in which the preparations for the job were made and the manner in which we approached Borrisoleigh that night.

Jim Stapleton did most of the planning, and he was convinced that, from Maher's yard, we could attack the roof of the barracks and set it on fire, with bottles of paraffin oil and mud bombs, while the garrison were pinned down in the barracks, by rifle and shotgun fire

from the opposite side of the street where there was suitable cover for the riflemen and shotgun men. It was decided to go ahead on these lines, and on the night of June 28th, the roads leading from Borrisoleigh to Templemore, Nenagh and Thurles were blocked and manned by strong parties of Volunteers. The road from Borrisoleigh to Upperchurch was left open, for this was the road by which we approached the town and it was also our line of retreat.

At about 10 p.m. on that summer's night, we started from Glastrigan, conveying the bottles of paraffin, mud bombs and our equipment, by ass and cart. I might say that we got a send-off from Glastrican, and we were accompanied along the road to Borrisoleigh by men and boys who were never even members of the Volunteers. We reached Borrisoleigh about midnight, and we deposited the bottles of oil and mud bombs outside Ryan's public house at the corner of the Square. We had no difficulty in getting the riflemen and shotgun men quietly into their positions. The town was then dead quiet.

Amongst those with us that night was Seumas Burke, then T.D. for the constituency and later Minister for Local Government in W.T. Cosgrave's Free State Government. Burke, Jim Stapleton, myself and a few others then entered Maher's yard by a laneway, leading from the Main Street. Some few of the men were detailed to act as runners, bringing the bottles of oil and the mud bombs from where we had left them to Maher's yard.

There was no window or loop-hole from the barracks overlooking Maher's yard, and we were safe enough in that respect, but the distance from the yard to the

barrack roof was much greater than I had anticipated. It was apparent before we started at all that it would be very difficult to land the bombs where they were likely to remain on the roof. When we did start, a lot of the bombs rolled off the roof before exploding. We experienced little better luck with the bottles of oil. After the bombs and the oil, we fired lighted torches, made of rags and wood. Some of these did blaze up, but the fire they created was not sufficiently strong to get the roof burning. We kept up our efforts until our supplies of paraffin and mud bombs were exhausted, and then we had no option but to call it off. I would say that we were at least an hour in Borrisoleigh that night. Whilst the attack on the roof lasted, and for some time afterwards, the police kept up an almost continuous din of fire from the barracks. Several times, they sent up Verey lights for assistance, but, as far as I am aware, no reinforcements were despatched to their aid from either Templemore, Nenagh or Thurles during the night.

That attack on Borrisoleigh barracks was, I think, the last incident worth recording which took place in the battalion area prior to the Truce of July 11th, 1921. There were many incidents of a minor nature, such as, holding up postmen and examining mails, during the years of 1919 to 1921, which I have refrained from mentioning.

One of our great difficulties was lack of a first rate intelligence service. We had no contacts with friendly members of the enemy forces, and whilst

the people working in the post offices in the battalion area were friendly and willing to help, they were unable to tap any worthwhile information, for their offices were all of the rural type. Again, especially coming near the end of the campaign, we could have done with some useful technical men, skilled in the use of electrical mines which proved so successful in some of the Cork brigades.

SIGNED: *Patrick J. Runney*

DATE: 15th August 1956

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